SHEPHERDING SMALL CHURCHES THROUGH BIBLICAL PREACHING

A THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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To my dear wife, Wilma Balla,

who patiently and prayerfully journeyed with me.

To my three beautiful daughters, Joanna, Jemimah, and Tara,

who encouraged me.

To my Hope Church Sharon family, who prayerfully supported me.

To all the fellow shepherds

who are faithfully feeding, leading, and protecting their flock.

All the Glory and Honor to

Our Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

—1 Peter 5:2-4 (NLT)

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ABBREVIATIONS

EBC	Evangelical Baptist Church
DMIN	Doctor of Ministry
GCTC	Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
HCS	Hope Church Sharon
MA	Massachusetts
MDIV	Master of Divinity
SIFC	Sharon Inter-Faith Clergy
USA	United States of America
YWAM	Youth with a Mission

FIGURES

Figure #1

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ABSTRACT

The motivation for this study came from a deep desire to become a shepherd after God's heart for God's flock in Hope Church Sharon. This study examined the biblical understanding of shepherding and preaching to raise biblically literate witnesses in our churches and communities.

Our hypothesis states that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, which produces biblically illiterate church witnesses. We explored the empirical data on biblical illiteracy, designed a survey, and conducted personal interviews with pastors and Christian leaders. The data collected affirmed our hypothesis and provided encouraging solutions.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

The author of this thesis-project grew up in a 4th-generation Christian family in Andhra Pradesh, India. At age 18, he had a conversion experience and sensed a call to serve God full-time that compelled him to join a theological seminary to obtain a Bachelor of Divinity and become a pastor. Little did he know that God had a different plan in mind. In 1985, he joined a six-month discipleship training program with *Youth with a Mission* (YWAM). It was an intense and intentional discipleship program for anyone who wanted to know God and make Him known. What began as a short-term training ended up as a job of 20 years with YWAM.

Personal Ministry Experience

During his ministry with YWAM in India, God worked through him to equip young people in various parts of the world through Christian discipleship. Although he had been a mission leader with a pastor's heart, the desire to become a full-time pastor remained a dream of his. In 2005, he enrolled as in the Master of Divinity (MDIV) program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) in Boston, Massachusetts (MA). Upon completion of that degree in 2008, God opened a door for him to become pastor of a multicultural church in Quincy, MA, a semi-urban town in the New England region, a region that tends to favor insiders and is resistant to change and reserved.[1]

[1] New England Research Project, a joint effort of Vision New England and the Ockenga Institute at GCTS. Appendix I.

Working in a small church, he learned the importance of creating a loving community where everyone is welcomed, valued, and fed with biblically solid food. After eight years in Quincy, God led him to Hope Church in a suburban town called Sharon, MA. The last seven years in Hope Church Sharon (HCS) have been a great learning experience in shepherding the flock at HCS. He noticed a lack of witnessing from church members in their community and beyond and wondered what was causing such apathy and disengagement. Part of the reason is a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding, leading to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses.

During his pastoral ministry in two small churches, he has sought to lead the flock, equip them for service, and help them become committed disciples of Christ. However, numerical growth remained elusive regardless of how hard we tried. He justified his work by saying, "They have grown spiritually," which left him unsatisfied and with several unanswered questions such as:

- Why are the churches in the New England region not growing but declining in numbers?
- Where does the fault lie if the flock (the congregation) is not growing spiritually and numerically?

He wanted to understand what biblical shepherding and preaching would look like. How could he become an effective shepherd to feed and care for his small flock? How could he help the church members become effective witnesses? These questions form the basis of this exploration.

The premise of this research study is that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding would lead to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. We will bring together from the material available on shepherding and biblical preaching, diving into the

primary source—the Bible—to understand and rediscover the biblical role of the shepherd. We shall assess biblical literacy among Christians in small churches through a survey followed by personal interviews with pastors and ministry leaders. We believe that preaching through the books of the Bible may be an effective way to equip biblically literate witnesses. We will also share what we have learned and practice in these three areas: shepherding, preaching, and witnessing. This is where we believe there is a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding and biblical preaching in small churches in the New England region.

A Lack of Biblical Understanding of Shepherding

In one of our monthly Zoom meetings of the Sharon Inter-Faith Clergy (SIFC) group, a Jewish rabbi of a sizable synagogue in Sharon grieved, saying, "In your clergy job description, along with preaching and teaching, do you have a section that said, 'and other activities'?" He was caught up doing other activities more than shepherding his flock and was left feeling frustrated. In the past two years—particularly given the nature of the pandemic—pastors have focused more on "other activities," such as building maintenance, fundraising projects, setting up Zoom meetings, and producing live streams, than on caring for their members. These activities are often necessary, but are they the primary activities of pastors?

As shepherds of our flocks, we wondered what other activities have been keeping us busy other than caring for the sheep. Seems like there is a lack of biblical theology of shepherding. In our 17 years of living in the United States of America (USA), we have observed some megachurch pastors who see themselves as the CEOs of a corporation. Some churches view their pastors as mere hired employees.

CEO's, Employees, or Pastors?

The following job description of a pastor from *Indeed*, a job recruiting webpage, supports our assumption of how churches view their pastors. According to *Indeed*, some of the duties and responsibilities of a pastor are:

> Preparing sermons by researching and writing about how to present Bible lessons to the congregation to meet their spiritual needs. Officiating at special occasions in the congregants' lives such as confirmations, weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Helping the church ministry by attending to administrative duties.[2]

This job description does not address the biblical role of a shepherd. This platform has further highlighted different skills that are required of pastors.

1. A pastor must have speaking and writing skills to teach the staff, comfort the congregation, and talk to the press as necessary.
2. The ability to keep information private when working with congregation members to better counsel and comfort them in times of crisis. A pastor should respect a congregation member's privacy during and after pastoral counseling.
3. Knowledge of church software to manage church administrative duties.
4. Project management skills to work with the church administration.
5. A strong moral character to give an excellent religious example to the congregation.[3]

Unfortunately, moral character only appears at the end of the list as an afterthought. Our modern-day over-emphasis on organizational and administrative skills contradicts God's selection process of leaders and shepherds of His flock.

In the article "The Cautionary Tale of Jerry Falwell, Jr.," Mark Galli exposes why some megachurch pastors and leaders of Christian institutions fail.

> It's reminiscent of many pastoral job descriptions today. One prominent megachurch seeking a senior pastor posted that the successful candidate would wear the "dual hats" of pastor and CEO. Not much was said about what they mean by a pastor. But regarding the CEO part: "This leader will … fan the flames of [the church's] DNA of boldness,

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[2] https://www.indeed.com/hire/job description/pastor?gclid=Cj0KCQjwgYSTBhDKARIsAB8KukvxX4d8CGNTb6jnXwVShtufG1_h4NmhMcTD4Dejz14ZjRpZvXlZH18aAuQXEALw_wcB&aceid= (Accessed June 28, 2022).

[3] https://www.indeed.com/hire/job description/pastor?gclid=Cj0KCQjwgYSTBhDKARIsAB8KukvxX4d8CGNTb6jnXwVShtufG1_h4NmhMcTD4Dejz14ZjRpZvXlZH18aAuQXEALw_wcB&aceid= (Accessed June 28, 2022).

> innovation, and creativity." Such job descriptions are found everywhere. We've fallen head over heels for the entrepreneurial leaders at Christian universities, evangelical nonprofits, and local churches. We talk the talk of servant leadership but walk the walk of "Gentile rulers" who "lord it over" others (Mk 10:42)
>
> We're fascinated with men and women who can grow influence and finances. We want "movers and shakers" who can "make a difference." We hire not for humility and service but for boldness, innovation, and creativity. Big is beautiful!
> Maybe it's time for us to put the pastoral dimension of all Christian leaders in the driver's seat and let the CEO dimension sit in the back.[4]

The job description on *Indeed* and Mark Gallie's articles are just a few examples to support our view that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching in churches, producing biblically illiterate witnesses.

A Lack of Biblical Preaching in Churches

Can a lack of biblical preaching yield biblically illiterate witnesses? It was 1982, the early weeks of the newfound faith in Christ of the author of this thesis-project. Seeing the excitement for the Gospel faith, his father suggested that he spoke on the fifth word of Jesus on the Cross during a Good Friday service. The words were "I am thirsty." (Jn 19:28)[5] While preaching, he felt it like a baptism of fire and caused physical thirst. That was his nervous beginning of life-long preaching. Since then, he has repeatedly preached God's Word in several settings, always approaching the delivery of a sermon with fear and trembling as he delivers God's Words. During one Sunday service back in India, as a zealous but immature disciple of Christ, he called one of our church elders up for he deviated from the sermon and started talking about politics with a note that read, "Sir, stop talking about politics, and please get back to the

[4] https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/november/jerry-falwell-jr-biblical-leadership.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[5] All Bible passages are taken from the New Living Translation, unless otherwise noted.

Word." To everybody's surprise and his mother's shock, the preacher abruptly ended his message, concluding the service. After the service, he apologized to the preacher for being insensitive. Since then, he has mellowed down from such confrontations yet remained passionate about biblical preaching.

We, as pastors, are accountable to God for what and how we feed His flock. Some pastors here in the USA would rather preach their sermons on politics, controversies, and self-help topics than feed the flock with solid biblical preaching. Instead of taking their congregation through systematic biblical preaching that nourishes our souls, they preach what the congregants want to hear. This lack of biblical preaching produces biblically illiterate witnesses. A condensed web article by Chip Warren explains the status of modern churches and who is to be blamed for their lack of spiritual depth.

> I love to read the derivations of various sayings. "A mile wide and an inch deep" is attributed to Edgar Nye, referring to a river in the Midwest. It has come to mean being shallow or lacking depth in a particular subject matter. I do believe this saying is an apt description of the modern church. There is a lot of activity but not much spiritual depth. When I interned at First Baptist Church of Roanoke, VA, my fellow intern had a similar saying, "some Christians had the spiritual depth of a pizza pan."
>
> Some local churches do not provide systematic or consistent training in fundamental Christian doctrine. On the other hand, some churches offer systematic and constant opportunities for training, but not everyone takes advantage of it. They are content to be a mile wide and an inch deep. They are like the spiritual infants Paul described in Ephesians 4:14, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."
>
> Another reason for the lack of spiritual depth today is that many don't take the time to read good Christian books. The state of the pulpit of the modern church is not only an indication, but it also may be part of the reason for our churches' lack of spiritual depth. Pastors are spread a mile wide with many church activities and demands. And because of this, sermon preparation time gets squeezed. While there are certainly exceptions, many pulpits of the modern church have become anemic and watered down.[6]

[6] https://www.sandmountainreporter.com/free_share/article_8b069ffc-6860-11e9-a008-83facd4aacfc.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

As stated on this article, a lack of biblical preaching along with other factors produces ineffective witnesses. In our first church, we taught the congregants the basic Christian disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible study, giving, forgiveness, conflict resolution, leadership, and evangelism.

We want to introduce an example of how a lack of biblical preaching produces biblically illiterate witnesses. One of the first things we did was to bring the whole church together and discuss our vision and mission. We came up with the following statement: "Building a diverse community to preach the Gospel in Quincy and beyond." The oldest member and one of the church's trustees objected to our enthusiasm. She challenged our vision, saying we were a local church called to be in North Quincy and not responsible for the whole Quincy. She could not see the scope of the Great Commission of our Lord, who commanded us to "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone." (Mk 16:15)

In the essay titled "21 Books You Don't Have to Read Before You Die," Thomas Williams notes the recommendation of the editors of *Gentlemen Quarterly* (GQ) magazine:

> The editors recommend rewriting canons of Great Books by swapping out works that are hard to read, dangerously backward, or politically incorrect with more contemporary works that conform to the values and sensibilities of the modern cultural elite. So, out with Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, and of course, the Holy Bible, and in with chick-list, inclusive language, edgy plots, and entertainment purged of traditional values or outdated suppositions about the human person, family, and society.
>
> The Great Books are taken down in one fell swoop. "Some are racist, and some are sexist, but most are just really boring," we learn. First among these "overrated books" is the Bible, for which the GQ editors reserve some particularly choice epithets. It is "repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned," or, in a nutshell, "certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced."[7]

[7] https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2018/04/20/williams-gq-proposes-remolding-culture-updating-classic-literature/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

We do not fully agree with the views of the GQ editors. Those who have never read the Bible would come to such conclusions. But those whose lives have been impacted by the Bible would say, "So I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll. 'Fill your stomach with this,' he said. And when I ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth." (Ezk 3:1-3)

Unlike the great contemporary books, the Bible is not man's production but divine production. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right." (2 Tim 3:16) C.S Lewis affirms, "It is Christ himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers will bring us to Him."[8] Bradley Jersak remarks, "When I reoriented from Bible to Christ as the locus of the Word of God, Scripture became my map or an inspired compass rather than my destination; its authors, narrators, and events all employed by God's Spirit, directing me to pursue the Person."[9]

Franklin Graham responded to GQ magazine's recommendation in a Facebook post:

> GQ magazine just included the Bible in "21 books you don't have to read before you die." Wow—they couldn't be more wrong. Their article says the Bible is "repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned." They can't explain why the Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. Recent estimates put the number that have been distributed since 1815 at more than 5 BILLION copies—and over 100 million are printed yearly! The Holy Bible is God-breathed, living, active, and sharper than a double-edged sword. There's nothing more powerful and nothing more needed by humanity than the Word of God. Maybe the GQ editors need to reread it. The subject of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is Jesus Christ. And one day soon, every knee will bow, and every tongue confesses that He is Lord.[10]

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[8] Jersak, Bradley. *A More Christ Like Word: Reading Scripture the Emmaus Way.* (New Kingston, PA: Whitaker House, 2021), p. 29.

[9] Jersak, *A More Christ*, p. 39.

[10] https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1899730233416482&id=131201286936061 (Accessed January 12, 2024).

We agree with Lewis, Jersak, and Graham rather than the outlandish recommendation of the GQ Magazine. We wholeheartedly believe the Holy Bible should be the number one book in everyone's reading list. As the psalmist suggested, those who read, meditate, and live by it are blessed, "But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do." (Ps 1:1-3)

Our Engagement with the Scriptures

Volunteering to read the Bible at their nightly family devotions at a very young age, God planted the desire for His word in the heart of the author of this thesis-project. There were only a few discipleship resources in the 80's. It was a delight to be able buy and own a Holy Bible in his native language—*Telugu*—and read it from cover to cover. He learned, not only to read the Bible, but also to apply its principles to daily life. There is a personal story of testing that helped him trust God's providential care. In 1985, as a young missionary in YWAM India, trusting God for your needs was a new concept. Many who grew up in Eastern cultures would know to seek help from their parents, not God.

One evening, one of the staff said, "Francis, there is an envelope for you in the mailbox." Upon opening it, there was a 100 Indian Rupees bill and a note saying, "Francis, we love you. Trust God for your finances and needs." That was the first time he was ever told he could trust God for his finances and needs. One day, when searching his pockets because he was hungry, he had no money to buy a snack. Hunger became severe and he realized that it was an excellent opportunity to test God, praying, "Dear God, can you please provide me with two chapattis (Indian bread)? Thank you! Amen!" Upon waiting for the ceiling to be opened and for God to

drop two chapattis down, it ended up not happening that way. However, a good friend from Goa arrived. “Francis, I’m going to a restaurant. Would you like to join me?” “What? You think I have money?”, He thought out loud. Yet, He joyfully accepted the invitation. According to Indian tradition, the person who had made the invitation, should pay the bill. They sat down in a small restaurant not far from their house. Cassius ordered two chapattis for himself and two for his companion. That was exactly what he had prayed for. Cassius could have ordered Masala Dosa, something more familiar to Chennai (South India). Chapati is not a regular meal item there. “Cassius, I must tell you something. I was hungry, and I asked God for two chapattis.” Praise God! He provided exactly what was asked of Him.

Seeing how God worked a minor miracle on our behalf was so amazing. Cassius responded, “As I was about to leave the house, the Lord said, “Francis is hungry; take him with you.” In the end, we both thanked God and rejoiced. Cassius had learned to hear and obey God’s voice and the researcher realized that he could trust God for his food and other needs. It may be a trivial experience, but it taught both if us valuable lessons about trusting God for our needs. God used this situation to teach us that we do not need to worry about what we shall eat, drink, and wear. Very early in his Christian faith, the researcher learned that it is not enough to read the Scriptures but to apply them to his life. The scriptural principles have worked for him, and he believes they will work for all those committed to reading and obeying them.

Hope Church Sharon

HCS was begun in 1957 by several families dedicated to the Scriptures and missions. There can be times in the lives of believers when difficult decisions need to be made to maintain a walk in keeping with God's desires and wishes. Such was the decision when several

families left their church home to form what is now known as HCS. The families who formed Evangelical Baptist Church (EBC) as Hope Church was initially called, for the most part, had young children, and the religious education of children was a key priority. The fledgling church joined the Baptist General Conference, now known as "Converge Worldwide," and adopted their statement of faith.

HCS is located in Sharon, MA. The town of Sharon looks like a typical New England town—its central Post Office Square is marked by three tall white church spires, its tree-lined streets leafing green in summer and traced with delicate white lace in winter.

Demographics of Sharon as of 2022 includes:

- Population: 18,408 residents; 85.31% White; 1.61% Black or African American; 10.94% Asian
- Religious Places: 10 Synagogues, and 7 Churches, One Mosque. Over 160 Hindu families.
- Over 5,500, nearly 1/3 of the town's population, are ages 55 or over.

HCS endeavors to be more intentional in encouraging, including, and developing younger people for the sake of the Kingdom in our local community and beyond. HCS remains dedicated to Christian education and the spiritual growth of its attendees. Bible studies and classes are offered for all age groups on Sunday mornings and during the week in small-group settings. HCS is committed to sharing the good news with all people.

Conclusion

Reflecting on his spiritual journey and years of missions' experience in YWAM India, the author of this thesis-project realized that being a shepherd of HCS would be a challenge. We

hope that, by the end of this thesis-project, we will be better equipped to be a better under-shepherd to equip and care for God's flock at HCS. We shall seek to encourage and work with fellow shepherds in the New England region for His glory.

The following chapters will further develop this premise that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding would lead to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses in our churches.

- Chapter 2, Biblical and Theological Foundations, explores the biblical understanding of shepherding and the theological view of preaching and shows how shepherding and preaching are inseparable. We will explain the reason why the author of this thesis-project chose the words shepherd and shepherding over pastor and pastoring.
- Chapter 3, The Literature Review*,* interacts with various books, articles, and video and audio messages to understand what biblical preaching is and what it is not as well as the importance of preaching through all the books of the Bible.
- Chapter 4, Thesis-Project Design, focuses on the design of the research project and methods to be used to corroborate the hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses.
- Chapter 5, Outcomes, presents all the results and data collected during the implementation of the research thesis-project designed and the data analysis. We will share the lessons learned during the process as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In Chapter 1, we laid out the framework for the premise that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching and, thus, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. This chapter explores the biblical understanding of shepherding and preaching and how they are interconnected.

Definitions

There seems to be a disconnect between what is expected of a pastor/shepherd in the Scriptures and how modern-day pastors view themselves. In our interactions with various pastors, we have discovered that this disconnect often affects their relationship with the flock they were called to lead. Let us define two words, *pastor* and *shepherd*, which we use interchangeably.

> Pastor: The exact English origin of a pastor comes from Latin pastor, and later Old French *pastur:* pastor/shepherd. In Latin, a pastor is a Christian who takes care of the spiritual needs of other Christians. A person who tends sheep; shepherd (now rare). A minister or a priest in a Christian church. Someone with spiritual authority over a group of people.[1]

A web-based dictionary defines a pastor as "a spiritual overseer, especially a clergy person serving a local church or parish."[2] The word pastor in the New Testament is not a separate

[1] https://etymologeek.com/eng/pastor (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[2] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pastor#h1 (Accessed January 12, 2024).

office as we call it, but one of the five gifts that Christ gave to the church. "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers." (Eph 4:11) As per this Scripture, a pastor is not a title but a function.

We must say a few words about the title of this thesis-project, *Shepherding Small Churches Through Biblical Preaching.* Some may think that the title is too archaic to be grasped by the modern mind. Instead of pastoring, we have deliberately chosen the word shepherding because it captures the biblical concept of shepherding. There are some weighty reasons for that. Firstly, a shepherd is a familiar and constant figure in Eastern cultures, where much of the Bible was written. In our vernacular Indian language, *Telugu Bible,* the word shepherd is used for a congregational pastor. Hence, we grew up hearing the word shepherd more than the word pastor. Secondly, we chose the words shepherd and shepherding because they are frequently used in the Bible, whereas the word pastor is used only once. (Eph 4:11) Thirdly, the word pastor is misunderstood nowadays. In his article, *"The Church Needs Shepherds, Not Coaches,"* Paul Lamey laments the loss of pastoral function in churches.

> It took me a moment to realize that he was a pastor and not a coach for a sports team or some motivational speaker/CEO type. I met Bill at a conference for pastors. He explained that he was a coach for his clients, seeking to guide them through their stories. I thought we were at a pastor's conference, and now this guy with a client base is waxing about directing people in some vague story. I finally realized that "coach" was his way of saying *pastor* and that the "story" he was directing was a metaphor for *life*. Confusing? What about his "clients"? Those, he explained, are the members of the congregation.
>
> Some pastors unwittingly eschew solid and timeless biblical terminology in favor of denuded jargon that can mean nothing. I think even Fletch was on to something when asked, "What do you do for a living?" he replied, "I'm a shepherd." The Bible says church leaders are shepherds (Act 20:28; 1 P 5:1-2; Jn 21:16). This describes what leaders are and encapsulates their primary function amidst the church. More than merely being called pastors, church leaders are told to pastor/shepherd. In other words, *pastor* is not a designation as much as a job description that entails shepherding. The church needs shepherds, not coaches.[3]

[3] https://expositors.org/the-church-needs-shepherds-not-coaches/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

We use contemporary words such as pastor, coach, and CEO to attract a younger generation. Lamey is one of several who argue the need to bring the obsolete words and concepts of a shepherd and shepherding back to the forefront.

Timothy S. Laniak, who observed the lives of real shepherds from many nations, observes,

> I wanted firsthand exposure to the cultural fabric of this central metaphor chosen to convey profound and timeless truths about leadership. Returning to my work of training shepherds for the church, I found an eager audience for these images and insights and their implications for contemporary ministry. Though some have doubts, I am more convinced that the shepherd metaphor needs to be reinvigorated rather than replaced.[4]

As someone who grew up in rural villages in India, hearing the word shepherd is more comforting than the word pastor. Haddon W. Robinson argues the concept of shepherding is challenging to understand for city dwellers.

> Understanding the Twenty-third Psalm can also be difficult because its imagery is foreign to city dwellers. In saying, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," the psalmist compares God to a weather-driven shepherd. To appreciate this metaphor, we have to leave our air-conditioned houses and live for a while under the blazing hot Middle Eastern sun. It might be clearer if we paraphrased the Psalm, "The Lord is my mechanic and keeps me in repair." That, of course, would ruin it. To an Israelite shepherd, sheep were not machines. We value the Twenty-third Psalm because it is personal. God demonstrates the same patient, tireless care of His people that a good shepherd shows for his flock.[5]

We are passionate about bringing back the biblical image of a shepherd and the compassionate responsibilities of a caring and loving shepherd for God's flock in churches in general and, more specifically, small churches, as is the context of my ministry.

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[4] Laniak, Timothy S. *While Shepherds Watch Their Flock.* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2007), pp. 15-17.

[5] Robinson, Haddon W. *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2002), pp. 10-11.

Why Small Churches?

Fellow pastors often asked us this question: How big is your church? We always felt embarrassed to say our church is small and has an average attendance of 40 to 50 people. We wished and wanted to pastor a bigger church, but neither of the churches we have pastored ever reached an attendance of 70 people. Do numbers matter? It looks like they do for many pastors in the USA. We would love to see HCS grow to over 100 people. That desire may or may not be fulfilled. Does that make us a failure? Do we give up our pastoral calling? No!

We have learned to be content with being the shepherd of a small flock that is emotionally and spiritually thriving. We understand it is immature to covet and compare our church with the church next door that may be larger in number. We want the pastors of small churches to be encouraged to shepherd the flock God has entrusted to them. We want to do all we can to love, feed, and care for flock at HCS.

In his interview, David J. Wood highlights Eugene Peterson's faithfulness as he cared for Christ Our King Presbyterian Church for 29 years. Wood talked with Peterson about his experience of the pastoral life and how the pastor's demanding and complex life can be lived with integrity and joy. When answering a question from Wood—Many people think there is a crisis in ministry today, a crisis of morality or morale. How do you see it?—Peterson responded:

> I sense that many people take on the role of pastor without ever learning it from the inside out. I understand that many of my colleagues have external rewards in view. How do I become a good leader? How do I get published? How do I do this? How do I do that? Those are questions that are beside the point. We're not a market-driven church; the ministry is not a market-driven vocation. We're not selling anything, and we're not providing goods and services. If you look at the numbers and money, American churches, in some ways, are the most successful churches ever. And yet, I think it could be argued we're probably at one of the low points because of the silliness and triviality that characterize so much of church life these days. This is one of the reasons I think pastoral work is best handled in a fairly small setting.

> Wood further probes, "What do you mean by "fairly small"? Somewhere between 50 and 500 people. The only way for a pastor to be discriminating and aware of human beings' deeply ingrained idolatrous nature is by learning to love a particular group of people in one place over time. They've got to know you are on their side even if you don't give them what they want you to give.
>
> They will not know that just from hearing you from the pulpit. You can only convey that to them by being with them, listening to them, feeling their pain and suffering, and even sharing their wrong ideas, but all the time, giving witness, whether verbal or silent, to the work of the Spirit.[6]

Peterson has a message for emerging pastors in a market-driven society. Paying attention to the words of this veteran shepherd would help aspiring shepherds to stay focused and humble. According to one report, "Two decades ago in New England, there were virtually no megachurches, loosely defined as those with a weekly attendance of 2,000 or more. Faith Church in New Milford, Connecticut, now figures among 18 in the region."[7]

Karl Vaters distinguishes between small, big, or mega churches in his book. s

> Numerically, the boundaries between churches of each size are relatively fluid, but here is what I mean by the following: House church: Less than 25 (meeting in a house). Small church: 25-350 (meeting in a building). Big church: 350-2,000. Mega church: Over 2,000.[8] In another article, Vaters notes that "small church" may be a fluid term, and you may not even agree with my current definition. But wherever we land on the numbers, your church matters. We are in this together.[9]

According to his definition, HCS may remain a small church for a long time, but it matters because it belongs to Jesus, who said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." (Mt 16:18) Another note on shepherding from Vaters states,

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[6] https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2002-03/best-life (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[7] https://newengland.com/yankee-magazine/living/new-england-environment/religion-churches-evangelical/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[8] Vaters, Karl. *The Grasshopper Myth.* (Montclair, CA: New Song Media, 2013), p. 35.

[9] https://karlvaters.com/what-is-a-small-church/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> Jesus never stopped being a shepherd, even though he took care of huge crowds. He sometimes used the rancher model, like when he sent out the 70 to preach and told the disciples to distribute the food to the 5,000-plus hungry people. But shepherding was always his primary mode of ministry. Since Jesus constantly taught and used the shepherding model but only occasionally taught or used the ranching model, shouldn't shepherding be our default setting too?[10]

Biblical Understanding of Shepherding

In this section, we will explore the biblical imagery of shepherding. What are the characteristics of a good shepherd? What are the rewards of shepherding? Shepherding may be a strange concept for those who grew up in the cities or on a ranch in the Midwest of the USA, but it is familiar to those who grew up in Eastern and rural cultures.

Tim Laniak details in his book *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks*,

> This book provides access to real shepherds' lives. Shepherds from many countries across the Middle East and beyond. Shepherds from many historical periods. The kind of shepherds the Bible makes much of. It came from my journey into these lives, searching for the context and meaning of the persistent pastoral imagery in Scripture.[11]

When we asked one pastor whether he had read this book; he said he thought it was a Christmas devotional. Hence, he did not pick it up and read it. It is helpful for any pastor who wants to care for God's flock.

Shepherd's Motif in the Old Testament

Shepherd's motif frequently appears in the Bible. Before his death, Jacob passed on the concept of God being our shepherd to future generations as he blessed Joseph and his boys. "May the God before whom my grandfather Abraham and my father, Isaac, walked—the God

[10] Vaters, *Grasshopper.* p. 32.

[11] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 15.

who has been my shepherd all my life, to this very day." (Gen 48:15) From that point on, people began to worship God as the shepherd of their lives. "Please listen, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph's descendants like a flock. O God, enthroned above the cherubim, display your radiant glory to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us!" (Ps 80:1-2)

Psalm 23 shows us how God shepherds His sheep (people). He leads His sheep to peaceful streams, lays them down in green pastures, and keeps them out of danger (Ps 23:2). The psalmist praises God for His intervention in Psalm 79:13, "Then we, your people, the sheep of your pasture, will thank you forever and ever, praising your greatness from generation to generation."

Mary Beth Gladwell states, "While perhaps not found with as much frequency as other motifs in the Bible, the theme of the shepherd is very significant. It appears at critical times in the narrative of the history of God's people, and hardly another motif is as rich in content."[12] God appointed leaders, kings, prophets, and priests as shepherds to care for His people. "You led your people along that road like a flock of sheep, with Moses and Aaron as their shepherds." (Ps 77:20) Here, we see Moses, a former prince of Egypt, and Aaron, a priest, as shepherds. God called King Cyrus, "He is my shepherd." (Isa 44:28)

God called some of the leaders of Israel the shepherds (Ezk 34:1). From tending a flock of sheep, God called David to shepherd and lead Israel (2 Sam 5:2). Laniak notes,

> Not only did the kings of Israel see themselves as shepherds, but some non-Israeli kings also. Consider the words of Neo-Assyrian King Assurnasirpal I, a figure roughly contemporary with David: Without rival among the princes of the four quarters, the wonderful shepherd, who fears not opposition, the mighty flood who has no conqueror, the king who has brought into subjection those that were not submissive to him, the

[12] https://dwellcc.org/learning/essays/shepherd-motif-old-and-new-testament (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> mighty hero who treads on the neck of his foe, who tramples all enemies under foot, who shatters the might of the haughty.[13]

Prophets as Shepherds of God's People

In the Old Testament, God raised several prophets and commissioned them to shepherd His people. Jeremiah was set apart from his mother's womb to be a prophet to the nations. Here is Jeremiah's job description, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth! Today, I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant." (Jer 1:10) Later, Jeremiah speaks of how he fulfilled his job as a shepherd of Israel. "Lord, I have not abandoned my job as a shepherd for your people." (Jer 17:6)

Perhaps, more than any prophet in the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel is known for his harsh condemnation of the shepherds of Israel. God pronounces judgment on the shepherds of Israel for their negligence and mistreatment of God's flock. God called Amos an authentic shepherd of sheep from Tekoa in Judah to shepherd Israel (Am 1:1).

Shepherd's Motif in The New Testament

The same motif continued in the New Testament with Jesus Christ, who came as a fulfillment of the prophecies of two Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah prophesied that God would raise a righteous descendant from King David's line one day. "He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land." (Jer 23:5) Ezekiel prophesied how God himself would search and find His sheep like a shepherd and rescue them

[13] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 111.

from all the places where they were scattered. He will bring them back home to their land of Israel from among the peoples and nations (Ezk 34:11-13).

Jesus partially fulfilled these prophecies while He was on Earth and will fulfill them in fullness when He returns to the Earth and establishes His Kingdom. During His ministry, Jesus went after the lost sheep of Israel. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them as a shepherd because “they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matt 9:36)

We read about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep in John 10:14-16. Jesus declared twice in these verses that He was the Good Shepherd, distinguishing Himself from the bad shepherds of the ancient and His time, who neglected to care for God’s flock. Jesus expressed His concern for all the wandering sheep outside God’s flock. “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So, I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one Shepherd.” This explains how God is unsatisfied until His lost children come home to be with Him. If that was a crucial concern for Jesus, should it not be our concern too?

In the parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:10-14, we see how God leaves the righteous and goes after that one lost soul. Furthermore, Luke writes, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” (Lk 19:10) Who were the lost in this passage? Isaiah clarifies man's lostness, "All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.” (Isa 53:6) This verse explains how the Good Shepherd will rescue His sheep.

After accomplishing His rescue mission, Jesus found a successor who would carry it further after He departed to heaven. In John 21, we read about Jesus’ commissioning Peter to be

a shepherd of God's flock with specific instructions to feed and care for His flock (Jn 21:15-17). Peter passed on his shepherding responsibility to his fellow elders to take care of the flock that God had entrusted them with all diligence so that they would receive a rich reward when the Great Shepherd (Jesus) appeared (2 P 5:1-5).

In the Bible, we see shepherding as a relay race. Throughout generations, it has been passed on from one shepherd to another. All pastors must take the biblical shepherd's motif to heart. Laniak observes,

> Including pastors, elders, in churches, and all believers in the community in positions of responsibility of groups either organized or unorganized, large or small, are leaders. All leaders are shepherds. Pastors and politicians. Corporate executives and stay-at-home parents. Chaplains and coaches. Teachers and hospice workers. Construction supervisors and county commissioners. Virtually all of us are shepherds, responsible to God for how we lead those in our care. Pastors should think of their congregations as sheep and shepherds working among their flocks.[14]

The concept that all leaders are shepherds is captivating. Here is how the shepherding concept resonates with others. Wilma works as a health and wellness coordinator for a human services organization. One day, in our conversation, she said, "One of my sheep was shy and reluctant to meet with the rest of the group." She saw herself as a shepherd of a group she was entrusted to lead and care for in a secular environment. During sharing time in of the meetings of SIFC, we shared that we longed for the flock to return home after the pandemic. While some have returned to church, others remain comfortable watching on Livestream. It was interesting to hear two rabbis, as well as a catholic priest, a congregational, and a unitarian minister, sharing similar struggles and mourning over their flock using the shepherding concept.

[14] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 18.

Three Parables of Jesus on Good Shepherding

Phillip Keller has done extensive work. He grew up in East Africa, surrounded by simple native herders. As a young man, Keller made his livelihood as a sheep owner and sheep rancher for eight years. Later, as the lay pastor of a community church, he shared the truths of Psalm 23 and John 10, as a shepherd, with his flock each Sunday for several months. In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd*, Keller shares how Jesus, our Good Shepherd, leads His sheep and how we follow Him in John 10.

Some background on John 10 would be helpful to set the stage. Jesus gained more popularity through His preaching and miracles throughout the Galilean region. Crowds were divided over whether He was a prophet or the Messiah. The Pharisees and priests sought an opportunity to arrest and possibly kill Him. As a shepherd who searched for the lost sheep, Jesus reached out and set a woman caught in adultery free from possible death in John 8 and healed a man born blind in John 9. On the other hand, the Pharisees threw the blind man out of the synagogue. Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man to the man who was healed. He enunciated how He came to give sight to people who are blind and expose the blindness of those who think they see. Some Pharisees heard Him and asked, are you saying we are blind? To expose their spiritual blindness, Jesus told three parables in John 10. Jesus made a bold statement, saying, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11) By asserting I am the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid out what is involved in shepherding God's flock. If a shepherd wants to be known or called a good shepherd, he must be ready to sacrifice his life. Jesus also distinguished himself from false shepherds by saying "I am the good shepherd."

Phillip Keller explains what it takes to be good at something.

> Any person is "good" in whatever he undertakes to the degree he devotes and dedicates himself to it. A "good violinist" becomes a good violinist only by putting his time, talents,

and attention into his art and instrument. A good runner becomes a top athlete only to the extent that he invests his strength, energy, and interest in his sport. And the degree to which anyone becomes "good" is the length to which he will give himself unhesitatingly to his chosen vocation.
Similarly, in speaking of our Good Shepherd, we are compelled to consider the enormous generosity with which He gives Himself to us without stint. The very nature and character of God, exemplified in Christ, convinces us beyond any doubt that He literally pours Himself out on our behalf.[15]

If we want to be good at shepherding God's flock, we ought to look at three parables in John 10 that would give us some principles about good shepherding. These parables are:

1. Parable to the sheepfold (vv. 1-5)

2. Parable of the gate (vv. 7-10)

3. Parable of the Good Shepherd (vv.10-17)

Parable of the Sheepfold

Phillip Keller explains what a sheepfold is.

It is an enclosure open to the wind. It is an enclosure open to the scrutiny of the owner. It is an enclosure not covered in, roofed over, or shielded from the eyes of the shepherd. It is not a barn, shed, or closed-in structure. The sheepfold's main purpose is to protect the sheep especially at night and in stormy weather.[16]

Keller notes on another unique purpose of the sheepfold,

A sheepfold is a name for an enclosure where sheep are generally kept at night, and it is also a term for managing sheep. In sheep countries, we often speak freely of "folding" sheep. By what we mean the much wider sense in which a flock of sheep is said to be "enfolded" by a certain owner of sheepman. The sheep come under his special management and his direct control continuously.[17]

[15] Keller, Phillip. *The Shepherd Trilogy.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), p. 230.

[16] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 147.

[17] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 148.

Based on Keller's explanation, a sheepfold conveys a special relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. In John 10:1, Jesus declared, “Anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must be a thief and a robber.” In other words, whoever comes and belongs to Jesus would be protected so that they would be safe and secure.

A good shepherd protects and manages his sheep well**.** That was what Jesus did while He was on Earth. He provided for, healed, and protected His disciples from the elements and ailments, and promised never to leave or abandon them. When He ascended to heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit, as promised, to be with and in Christ’s followers and aid them in their journey (Jn 14:16).

A good shepherd leads the way by going before the sheep. John 11: 4-5 states, “After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.” By spending extended time with the sheep, the shepherd cultivates trust among the sheep. The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice and follow him only when he leads them out.

Parable of the Gate

John 10:7-10 says,

> I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

A good shepherd becomes a gateway through which people can enter God’s fold to be protected and remain safe. Jesus—before His crucifixion—assured His troubled disciples how they and the people in the world might be saved and comforted by saying, “I am the way, the

truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6) In Keller's plain language, He says, "I am the way in and through which anyone can enter a splendid new life with God. Through Me, a man or woman discovers Truth, reality, purpose, and meaning. Through Me, one comes into the intimacy of the family of God our Father."[18]

Our chief Shepherd, Jesus, is the gate through which people enter God's fold. We, the under-shepherds, are only gatekeepers. Keeping up in the tradition of a shepherd, King David, said, "I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God" (Ps 84:10), and Levites were given the responsibilities of gatekeepers in the house of the Lord (1 Chr 9:19; 1 Chr 26:1, 12-19). May we become the faithful gatekeepers of God's flock.

Keller shares his take on Jesus' assertion, "I am the door of the sheep,"

> In our modern idiom, we would say: "I am the doorway, the entrance for the sheep." Too often, people wrongly think our Lord referred to Himself only as the door or gate to close a passageway into a sheepfold. This is not the picture. The whole process of sheep management, of folding sheep, is combined with controlling doorways and gateways. Opening and shutting these passageways allow the flock to move methodically in and out, from place to place. They pass in through it to the protection of the fold within. A flock has both an interior life within the shelter of the sheepfold and an exterior life outside. It is by means of the doorway, through the opening of the gate, that they enjoy both ingress and egress to a fully rounded and beneficial mode of life.[19]

Parable of the Good Shepherd

After asserting that He was the gate for the sheep, Jesus exposed the devil by referring to him as a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. John 10:10-11 states, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. I am the good shepherd." This verse conveys a good shepherd has the best intentions for his sheep. In contrast

[18] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 212.

[19] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 208.

to the devil's intentions, Jesus gives those in God's fold a rich and satisfying life. Only in Jesus can we have abundant life. Keller describes this beautiful intention of a good shepherd.

> Any shepherd who is a good manager always bears in mind one great objective. It is that his flock may flourish. The continuous well-being of his sheep is his constant preoccupation. All his time, skill, strength, and resources are directed to this end. Nothing delights the good shepherd more than knowing his livestock is in excellent condition. A good stockman revels in the joy of seeing his animals flourishing.[20]

How well are we taking care of God's flock in our churches? A good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. Jesus is our best example of offering His life for the sake of all the people—the sheep—so that they might have abundant lives. All the 12 disciples—except for Judas Iscariot—followed the Good Shepherd's example in laying down their lives.

The apostle Paul walked in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd as he wrote to Timothy, "As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near." (2 Tim 4:6) Subsequently, many have offered their lives to reach the lost sheep with the Gospel. They fed them with a study diet of the Good Shepherd's teachings. What does laying down of life look like for a 21st century under-shepherds of Christ? We may or may not be called to die for the sheep's sake, but are we willing to give up the legitimate rights to reach the lost sheep with the Gospel? Can we be less self-centered and become more others-centered? For us, it remains a challenge to follow the example of the Good Shepherd.

By saying a good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sake of his sheep, Jesus showed a distinction between a good shepherd and a hired hand who will run when he sees a wolf coming. After establishing how well Jesus and His sheep—His followers—knew each other, He expressed concern for the other sheep not yet in the sheepfold. A good shepherd is concerned for

[20] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 228.

the sheep outside the sheepfold. Any good shepherd is more concerned about their lost and wandering sheep than those in the fold, safe, and secured.

Consider Jesus' parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18:10-14. The essence of this parable is that the Kingdom of God is accessible to all, even those who were sinners or strayed from God's path. As a Good Shepherd, Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." (Lk 19:10) The following verse explains Jesus' concern for the sheep outside the flock. John 10:16 declares, "I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one Shepherd."

Keller explains the difference between a sheepfold and a flock.

> All over the earth, there are other lives, individual sheepfolds, scattered like so many sheep astray, whose intimate folds He is eager to enter. Their total would make up His final flock. It is important to recognize the difference between a flock and a fold. The shepherd is said to have only one flock. This flock is the sum of all the sheep that belong to him. A sheepfold is for lost individuals (little folds) who need a shepherd's rescue. They are everywhere, and the Good Shepherd is actively bringing them into His care and under His control so that all these folds become His one BIG flock.[21]

Bringing the lost sheep into His flock was one of Jesus the Good Shepherd's chief concerns. Should not that be a concern for His under-shepherds as well?

While at YWAM, we were motivated by the compassionate concern of Jesus, which was to seek and save what was lost. We are not concerned about building a local church. Instead, we devoted ourselves to the mission field. To that extent, we traveled to several places to share the Gospel. Even now, as under-shepherd of HCS, we are reminded of God's concern for all people of all nations. We encourage our members to have God's heart for the world rather than just focusing on our local church. We pray that we will be inspired by these three parables and strive

[21] Keller, *The Shepherd*, pp. 261, 262.

to lead as many lost sheep as possible to follow the Good Shepherd so that there will be one flock and one Chief Shepherd.

Theological View on Preaching

If one of the primary roles of a shepherd is to feed the sheep, how is it manifested in our churches? The following section explains the theological view of preaching by which shepherds feed God's flock.

As a young boy, more than anything, the pastor's sermon got our attention during the Sunday service. We were particularly interested in hearing the stories he would tell during the sermon. Upon having our salvation experience at age 18, we got excited about preaching. We saw preaching God's Word as a sacred function of a pastor by which they fed God's people. Since then, we have preached several sermons in various settings and continue to preach at HCS.

Though we love preaching, at times, we are sermon-fatigued, finding it hard to write up or preach one more sermon. What could help us fulfill God's call on our lives and avoid burnout? By returning to the Scriptures, we recapture the significance of our calling to feed God's flock through preaching.

Reasons Why We Preach

There are three main reasons as to why we preach the Word of God.

1. God's existence

We preach because God exists; He wants people to have a relationship with Him. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a Welsh minister who preached over 1,600 sermons on the Gospel alone, has this to say about the goal of preaching, "What is the chief end of preaching? I think it is this: It is to

give men and women a sense of God and His presence."[22] The greatest truth is knowing God exists; the greatest pursuit is reaching God. God showed us how to have a relationship with Him by sending Jesus. Jesus said, "My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt 11:7)

Jesus assured Philip—who wanted to see the Father—by saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) The apostle Paul gives us one of the most important reasons for preaching the Gospel in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5,

> We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

2. Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God during His ministry on Earth. Soon after He defeated Satan in the wilderness, Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." (Matt 3:17) Everything He did and say from that point onwards reflected the message of the Kingdom of God. Even after His resurrection, He taught His disciples for "40 days about the Kingdom of God." (Act 1:3)

For Jesus, preaching the Good News of the Gospel was His primary task; He never deviated from it. For instance, after multiplying five barley loves and two fishes to feed over 4,000 people, people intended to take Him away and make Him their king forcefully. Knowing their intentions, He slipped away into the hills by Himself (Jn 6:14-15). Speaking of the primacy of preaching in the church, Martyn Lloyd-Jones says,

[22] https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/chief-end-preaching (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> To me, the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. If you want something in addition to that, I would say without hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian church today is true preaching. As it is the church's greatest and most pressing need, it is obviously the world's greatest need also.[23]

In 1990, while serving with YWAM, we faced a crisis of faith when our mother, whom we loved dearly, passed away suddenly at age 47. At that time, while sick with chickenpox and getting ready to attend the funeral, we remember asking the Lord for a word to hold on to faith. This Scripture that the Holy Spirit brought to mind was, "But Jesus replied, We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." (Mk 1:38) After grieving with the family, we went back and continued to work with YWAM.

3. Jesus' command to His disciples

Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations. Jesus left his disciples with an assignment, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matt 28:19) We know this as the Great Commission. Some preachers call it, trivially, "The Great Omission." That may get good laughs from the congregation but loses its significance. However, the early disciples—doubtingly at first—took this commission to heart. They preached the Good News wherever they went. Many of them were martyred for their faith in Christ. One of the ways we make disciples of all people is through preaching. The apostle Paul, once a persecutor of the church, became one of the greatest preachers of the Gospel. He shared his resolve with the Corinthian church, saying, "Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it.

[23] Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 17.

How terrible for me if I did not preach the Good News!" (1 Cor 19:16) The apostle Paul explains how people will be saved,

> If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" (Rom 10:9-15)

God does not want anyone to be destroyed but wants everyone to repent (2 P 3:9). How could people repent and become followers of Christ without someone preaching the Good News to them first? We were encouraged by a sermon by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, which resulted in a renewed focus to continue preaching the Good News. The sermon titled "No Substitute" is summarized as follows,

> Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones opens the Word of God and confronts the tendency to depreciate preaching at the expense of other forms of activity. As those who have the Good News, Christians must tell the truth. Other agencies, politicians, cults, false religions, and nonprofits can do their work but cannot preach the Gospel. The church's primary task is not to make a person happy, good, or even well off. It is to deliver the truth about humanity and the remedy in Christ. The danger is that the church will tinker with the general symptoms and not address the cause. It takes a specialist to isolate the radical problem and deal with it. This is the work of every preacher, says Dr. Lloyd-Jones. God provides relief to others through the church's primary purpose of preaching. Lloyd-Jones adds that preaching the Gospel from the pulpit, applied by the Holy Spirit, has dealt with personal problems that the preacher knows nothing about. Counseling has its place, but most counseling will be done from the pulpit. Anything else fails to fulfill the great mandate given to the church.[24]

We need to recognize one of our callings is to feed God's flock through preaching. We began exploring how a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding contributes to a lack of biblical preaching that produces biblically illiterate and unengaged witnesses. That quest led us

[24] https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/preaching-and-preachers/no-substitute/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

to examine the theological views on shepherding and preaching from the Scriptures and various books as well as sermons on the subject. In the following section, we explore how shepherding and preaching are not apart from each other but interconnected. What happens to God's flock when shepherds fail to preach the whole counsel of God's Word?

The Connection Between Shepherding and Preaching God's Word

Throughout the Scriptures, we see shepherding and preaching going hand in hand. Tim Laniak comments, "In the Wilderness is where God revealed himself repeatedly as Provider, Protector, and Guide. These are the three primary roles of a shepherd."[25] According to a proverb, a shepherd would care for all of his sheep as a provider. "The godly care for their animals, but the wicked are always cruel." (Prov 12:10) God took care of Israel by appointing leaders who would care for His people. Laniak states that, "After centuries of leadership failure in the Old Testament, God promised Israel, through Jeremiah, that he would give them 'shepherds after my own heart.'" (Jer 3:15) Laniak exposes the lack of compassion of Israel's shepherds. "God watched the community's leaders and, like my Bedouin host, decided they did not deserve the 'family business' because they did not have the Owner's heart. God's anger surfaced again in Zechariah's preaching because 'their own shepherds take no compassion on them.'"[26] (Zech 11:5)

When the appointed leaders fail to care for God's flock, they are prone to be attacked by their enemies. God pronounced condemnation through the prophet Ezekiel on those Old

[25] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 16.

[26] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 31.

Testament leaders who failed in their shepherding task and provided shepherds of His own heart who would care for and feed all His sheep so that sheep could become safe, secure, and flourish.

> Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: What sorrow awaits you, shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks? Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended to the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty." (Ezk 34:2-4).
>
> This is what happens to God's flock when the shepherds fail.
>
> God's sheep have been scattered without a shepherd and have become easy prey for any wild animal. They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills across the face of the earth. Yet no one has gone to search for them. How did God deal with those unfaithful shepherds? God considered them his enemies. He held them responsible for what had happened to His flock and took away their right as shepherds and their livelihood. He rescued His flock from the hands of the careless shepherds. (Ezk 34: 5-11)

Another reason why shepherding and preaching are interconnected is portrayed by Laniak when he states that "Caring for sheep involves feeding them all the time. Feeding is the only way to secure healthy production."[27] He continues to support such connection,

> Sheep are prone to wander away, consume poisonous plants and weeds that provide only empty calories, and kill themselves eating trash. The Bedouin tribes in the Sinai knew the attributes of over one hundred plants. They knew which ones were for sheep, which were seasonal, and which were perennial. Clearly, if you care for sheep, you need to understand what your flock is eating. Empty calories just won't do.[28]
>
> Here is an explanation of Psalm 78 from Rabbinic Midrash, where God watches David lead his flocks out to feed. His was based on how he cared for his sheep. He would prevent the adult sheep from heading first to the pasture lands. He would lead the younger sheep out first so that they would graze off the soft, juicy grass. Then, he would take the older sheep to graze off the medium-grade grass; finally, he would take the young, robust sheep and let them graze off the tough-graded grass. The Holy One said: Let he who knows how to shepherd sheep according to their needs come and shepherd my people.[29]

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[27] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 59.

[28] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* pp. 59-60.

[29] Laniak, *While Shepherds,* p. 271.

Though this is an imaginative commentary, it gives some crucial pointers on tenderly caring for our members by giving them nourishing spiritual food to satisfy their hunger. We can learn what happens to a hungry and ill-fed sheep from Philip Keller's explanation. While reflecting on Psalm 23:2, "He lets me rest on green meadows," Keller observes four factors that would contribute to a sheep's rest: "free of all fear, free from friction with others of their kind, free of pests and parasites and, lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger."[30]

What applies to a sheep's rest applies to us humans as well. Once a week, we go without food for 24 hours. That night, difficulty falling asleep with the gnawing sounds of a hungry stomach are present. Being well-fed is vital to physical rest; being spiritually well-fed is equally essential for our soul and spiritual rest and health.

Keller elaborates on Psalm 23:2, "He lets me rest in green meadows,"

> Palestine, where David wrote this Psalm and kept his Father's flocks, especially near Bethlehem, is a dry, brown, sunburned wasteland. Green pastures did not just happen by chance. Green pastures were the product of tremendous land use, labor, time, and skill. They resulted from clearing rough, rocky land, tearing out brush, deep plowing, seeding, and planting special grains and legumes, irrigating with water, etc. All of this represented tremendous toil, skill, and time for the careful shepherd.[31]

Keller's explanation of what contributes to green pastures for sheep to be free from the fear of hunger comes as a reminder for the shepherds of God's flock. We are to invest time and energy and study God's Word to weed out controversies and ideologies posed by our culture and present a well-balanced truth from God's Word. May we lead our flock to the green meadows?

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[30] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 29.

[31] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 39.

He also explains why some believers hop from one church to another church. “A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, don't thrive, and are useless to themselves and their owners. They languish and lack vigor and vitality.”[32]

Being part of a Christ-centered, Bible-believing church is essential for Christ's followers' spiritual health and growth. It reminded us of our search for a church family as young Christian missionaries with YWAM in India. We attended four churches before settling with the Assemblies of God, where we were fed spiritually and grew strong in our faith. We remained with that church family for 20 years. It was our church home, where we were spiritually nourished.

We often hear new believers saying that they are searching for a church where God’s Word is preached. Several young families found that at HCS, which made them commit to the church, where they have raised their children for over 20 years. Therefore, we keep a tradition of having “Bible Times” for all ages on Sunday mornings. We try to feed them further during our sermons with a well-balanced spiritual diet. We may be small in numbers, but we are well-versed in the Word and strong in our Christian faith. That's perhaps what David had in mind when he penned these words, "He lets me rest in green meadows." (Ps. 23:2) The Chief Shepherd leads His sheep daily by green meadows of His Word. As we read, study, and meditate on His Word, may we rest in His presence and be deeply satisfied. When shepherds fail to feed God’s flock by preaching God’s word, the sheep become restless and scatter everywhere to satisfy their hunger. It happened to God’s people in the Old Testament.

[32] Keller, *The Shepherd*, p. 40.

When Prophetic Shepherding is Absent

In the Old Testament, God raised several prophets who shepherded the Israelites by giving them direction as they received messages from God, the Chief Shepherd of Israel. God spoke His message through His chosen instruments—the prophets. “Thus, Saith the Lord,” are familiar four words came from the mouths of God’s prophets in the Old Testament. Those four words authenticated the spiritual authority of God’s prophets and distinguished them from false prophets. When prophetic shepherds fulfilled their role by feeding people with God’s words, people followed God. But when they failed to carry out their role in the community, people went astray, followed other gods, and did evil in the sight of God.

We see this phenomenon after the deaths of Moses and Joshua. In Joshua 24:28-31, we read that Joshua dismissed the people to their inheritance. He died at age 110. Israel served the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and the elders who outlived him. After the death of Joshua, a vacuum of shepherding was acutely felt among the Israelites. An entire generation and successive generations turned their backs on God. In Judges 2:10-15, we read about the folly of Israel and God’s dealings with them.

> After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel. The Israelites did evil in the Lord’s sight and served the images of Baal. They abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods, worshiping the gods of the people around them. And they angered the Lord. They abandoned the Lord to serve Baal and the images of Ashtoreth. This made the Lord burn with anger against Israel, so he handed them over to raiders who stole their possessions. He turned them over to their enemies all around, and they were no longer able to resist them. Every time Israel went out to battle, the Lord fought against them, causing them to be defeated, just as he had warned. And the people were in great distress. (Jdg 2:10-15)

What caused such deterioration among God's people? We attribute it to a lack of prophetic shepherding. When prophetic shepherding is absent in the church or a nation, people turn away from God and go their own way. We see similarities to what happened to the Israelites

happening to many in the Western world. Consider the following. The Jesus movement began on the West coast of the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It primarily spread throughout North America, Europe, and Central America before it subsided in the late 1980s.[33] During the '80s, several of us got saved. We hungered and thirsted for God's Word. We put our faith in God and seldom question Him and His ways. Forty years later, several young people who grew up in Christian homes do not share the same faith or values as their parents. Many are deconstructing their faith. They question the very fundamental doctrines of Christianity. What went wrong? Have shepherds forgotten to feed their flock through biblical preaching? Have Christian parents failed to show their faith and devotion to their children? Or is the devil deceiving them through controversial cultural ideals?

Due to a lack of prophetic shepherding, the devil cleverly infiltrates that space by raising false prophets who do his bidding and deceive people, including the elect. The apostle Peter, who became a prime target of Satan while following Jesus, warned his congregants to be alert. "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith." (1 P 5:8-9) When a shepherd neglects his responsibility to care for and protect the sheep, wolves attack their sheep. Similarly, when pastors—the spiritual shepherds—fail to manage and protect God's flock through biblical preaching, wolves—the false teachers—deceive our congregations. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves." (Matt 7:15) Jesus warned that, in the end times, many false prophets will arise and deceive, if possible, even God's elect. (Matt 24:24)

[33] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_movement#Beliefs_and_practices (Accessed January 12, 2024).

As shepherds, let us take to heart the final words of the apostle Peter, to whom Jesus initially assigned to feed His sheep. “Preach the Word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.” (2 Tim 4:2) This kind of in-depth knowledge is necessary for a good shepherd who cares for his sheep by providing them with adequate, balanced nutrition to his sheep. A senior shepherd of Fairview Baptist Church has some advice for his fellow shepherds.

> False teaching has been and will continue to be one of the primary battlefronts in which pastors must engage in combat to protect the biblical fidelity of the local church. However, one could argue that the information age opened the floodgates to a watershed of false doctrine streaming into the local church in a way that we have yet to experience in her history. Our culture's epistemological *(the theory of knowledge)* and moral relativism have weaponized the wolves that seek to devour the doctrinal integrity of our congregations. The tactics are often subtle, but the implications reveal themselves swiftly when divisions, disagreements, falsehoods, and distortions contort the unity of our people. For this reason, protecting the sheep from wolves through our preaching is indispensable as we minister in the modern world. [34]

We could not agree more with pastor Matt Capps. Our call as pastors is to prophetically shepherd God’s flock by courageously preaching the whole counsel of God. After being restored from a folly of denial, Peter was given a two-fold task of shepherding God’s flock, which included feeding and caring for the lambs and the sheep. He shepherded God’s flock until the end of his life, leaving some instructions for us to follow in 1 Peter 5:2-4.

> Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care but lead them by your own good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

At the end of this address, Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to watch their own lives and the flock God has given them in Acts 20:28-30.

> So, guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock his church, purchased with his own blood over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not

[34] https://www.pastorscenter.org/blog/pastor-protect-the-flock (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.

Amid changing cultural trends, Fleming Rutledge strongly appeals to shepherds to keep preaching the Word to their flock.

> There is a real crisis of confidence about preaching in the church. Many churchgoers no longer know what preaching is, and since they do not know, they no longer expect to hear it. As our American culture drifts farther and farther away from its Christian moorings, a movement that is probably unstoppable, it is going to become more and more critical for those of us who are Christians to be not just remnants of a denomination but committed disciples of a living Lord. Week by week, in preaching the Word, we will encounter Jesus of Nazareth, not as the so-called "historical Jesus," but as the risen Christ. When the Christian preacher ascends the pulpit steps, he does not go to lay down human words from on high. The only person who is on high is the reigning Christ. I, like you, am one who, despite my sin, will be encountering him in his love for me and you. He meets us, preacher and congregation alike, in his Word.[35]

Conclusion

After thoroughly examining the primary sources, the Scriptures, and several written and spoken works of knowledgeable Christian authors on shepherding and preaching, we are certain of the dual assumption. A lack of biblical understanding of shepherding, leading to a lack of biblical preaching resulting in biblically illiterate and unengaged witnesses.

How do we meet this deficiency in our local churches? We suggest shepherding through biblical preaching. Shepherding and biblical preaching go together. Our preaching must be rooted in Scriptures, bringing God's biblical truths to feed all of God's flock. The next chapter will further engage on this subject matter by interacting with various authors on what we gathered from their written and spoken works.

[35] Rutledge, Fleming. *The Bible and The New York Times.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), pp. 3, 6.

CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents review of various books, articles, videos, and audio messages to understand what biblical preaching is to further examine the hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses; and to also emphasize in the importance of preaching through the books of the Bible. This exploration begins by asking the following question to ascertain biblical illiteracy in the churches.

Is Biblical Illiteracy a Problem Among the Churches?

A few nationwide research organizations' findings conclude that biblical illiteracy is a real problem. The figure below shows how many Christians read the Bible in the USA.

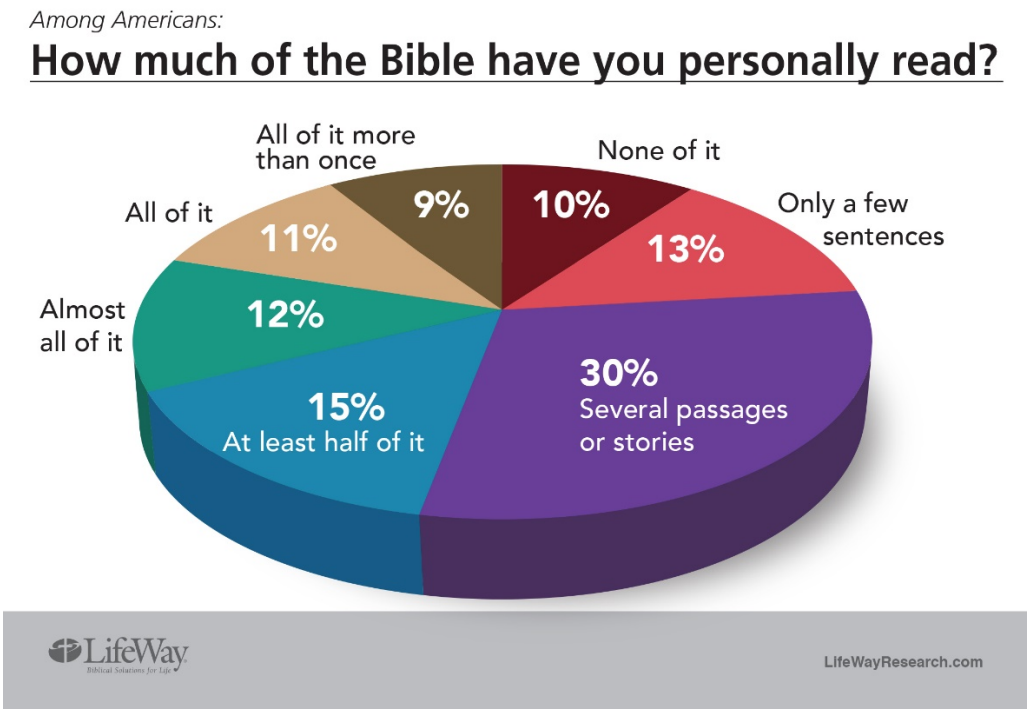

Figure #1: Lifeway Research: How many Christians read the Bible in the USA?

> The above pie chart shows how many Christians have read the Bible in the USA. Lifeway Research surveyed 1,000 and found one in five Americans has read through the Bible at least once. That includes 11 percent who've read the entire Bible once and 9 percent who've read it multiple times. Another 12 percent say they have read almost all of the Bible, while 15 percent have read at least half. About half of Americans (53 percent) have read relatively little of the Bible. Thirteen percent have read a few sentences. One in 10 has read none of it, and Thirty percent say they have read several passages or stories.[1]

Just think of it: One in ten Americans, about 31.4 million, have never read the Bible. A note from Life Way's Sunday school director, Ken Brady, confirms our hypothesis on Biblical illiteracy in the USA.

> America has a literacy problem. Almost 14 percent of the adult population cannot read. But illiteracy isn't just a problem in secular society. A far worse kind of illiteracy affects the church: Biblical illiteracy. Only 20 percent of Americans say they've read the entire Bible at least once. And only 22 percent say they systematically read through a section of

[1] https://research.lifeway.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

the Bible a little each day. A third of Americans never read the Bible on their own. This lack of Bible reading led to a lack of biblical doctrine.[2]

According to Pew Research

About a third of Americans (35%) say they read Scripture at least once a week**,** while 45% seldom or never read Scripture, according to 2014 data from our Religious Landscape Study. The frequency of reading Scripture differs widely among religious groups. Majorities of Jehovah's Witnesses (88%), Mormons (77%), Evangelical Protestants (63%), and members of historically black Protestant churches (61%) say they read Scripture at least once a week. By contrast, 65% of Jews say they seldom or never read Scripture.[3]

Research From American Bible Society

Answering the question, how often do people in the USA read the Bible? State of the Bible USA 2023 has interesting findings. "Not as often as they did a few years ago. For most of the last decade, about half of Americans said they used the Bible three or more times yearly."[4]

This qualified them, by our definition, as Bible Users. In last year's poll, that number dropped ten points. Only two in five Americans (39%) were Bible Users. Frankly, we were hoping this was a glitch, but the 2023 responses matched last year's low point (39%). The following figure indicates the decrease in Bible reading in the USA.

[2] https://research.lifeway.com/2017/07/10/discipling-in-an-age-of-biblical-illiteracy/#:~:text=Only%2020%20percent%20of%20Americans,the%20Bible%20on%20their%20own (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[3] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/04/14/5-facts-on-how-americans-view-the-bible-and-other-religious-texts/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[4] https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State_of_the_bible-2023.pdf page 20-21, (Accessed January 12, 2024).

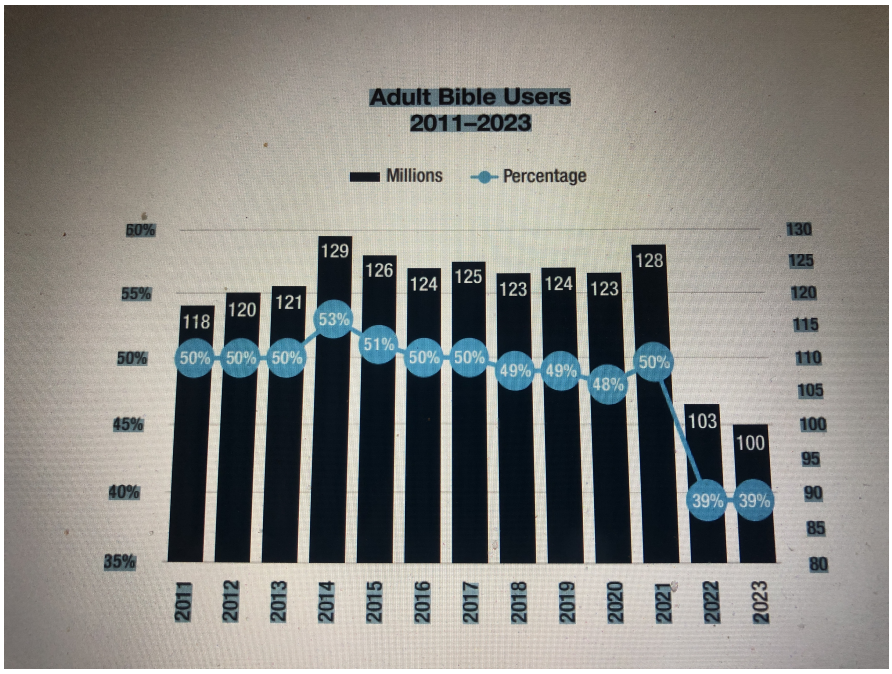

Figure #2: Bible Reading Decrease

> Considering that the State of the Bible polling is done in January, we can assume that responses cover most of the previous year. Thus, the recent high point of 50 percent Bible use occurred in 2020, when many people were cooped up at home with little else to do. The following two years saw a return to activity for many, and the Bible was not part of the reboot for a tenth of the population. Despite the downturn in Bible use, we can still say that about 63 million American adults (24%) use the Bible outside of a church service, at least once a week."[5]

Considering the research done by these three organizations, we learn that nearly fifty percent of American Christians do not read the Bible, and that trend seems to be increasing.

Anguishing Concerns of Some Experts over Biblical Illiteracy

> A Christian Post article, "Biblical Illiteracy in the US at Crisis Point, says Bible Expert," expresses the anguish of Kenneth Berding, a New Testament professor of 15 years at Biola's Talbot School of Theology. "Berding admits that his students have always had little knowledge about the Bible. But today, he says, biblical illiteracy has reached a crisis point. All the research indicates that biblical literacy in America is at an all-time low. My

[5] https://1s712.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible/stateofthebible/State_of_the_bible-2023.pdf page 20-21, (Accessed January 12, 2024).

experience teaching a class of new college freshmen every year for the past 15 years suggests that although students 15 years ago knew little about the Bible upon entering my classes, today's students, on average, know even less about the Bible. In an article titled “he Crisis of Biblical Illiteracy and What We Can Do About It” for Biola University's magazine, Berding described the problem as a famine.[6]

The Concern of the Barna Group

In 2014, the Barna Group, a leading research organization, conducted a study that indicated an ongoing silent migration away from the church. According to the Survey, an estimated 3,500 people leave the church each day, and over 1.2 million people will leave the church in the next year. In a recent news release about the study, Barna cited many contributing factors, the largest being an overall sense of disconnection from the local church.[7]

The American Bible Society

Researcher John Plake, of the American Bible Society, expressed his concerns:

> What we discovered was startling, disheartening, and disruptive. In 2021, about 50 percent of Americans read the Bible independently at least three or four times yearly. That percentage has stayed more or less steady since 2011. But in 2022, it dropped 11 points. Only 39 percent say they read the Bible multiple times yearly or more. It is the steepest, sharpest decline on record. More than 13 million of the most engaged Bible readers measured by frequency, feelings of connection to God, and impact on day-to-day decisions—said they read God's Word less. Currently, only 10 percent of Americans report daily Bible reading. Before the Pandemic, that number was at about 14 percent. Plake thinks the dramatic change shows how closely Bible reading, even independent Bible reading, is connected to church attendance. When regular services were interrupted by the Pandemic and related health mandates, it impacted not just the corporate bodies of believers but also individuals at home.[8]

From the data of the research groups and the concerns expressed by various experts, we may conclude that biblical illiteracy is indeed a problem in the USA. Bible reading by Christians

[6] https://www.christianpost.com/news/biblical-illiteracy-in-us-at-crisis-point-says-bible-expert.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[7] http://jcsentinel.com/feature_story/article_e7afc992-1687-11e5-aff8-e7c406d121ce.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[8] https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/april/state-of-bible-reading-decline-report-26-million.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

has declined over the years. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the problem. Something is to be said about the connection between attending a church regularly and reading the Bible. We wanted to find out how Christians engage in the Scriptures but found no available data.

The above findings give us enough reason to believe that biblical illiteracy among the churches is a real problem. We theorize that this biblical illiteracy is due to the lack of biblical understanding of shepherding, leading to a lack of biblical preaching. Understanding and practicing biblical shepherding and preaching could help reduce biblical illiteracy.

Biblical Preaching Produces Biblically Literate Witnesses

As we prepared to lead our first church, the previous pastor left us a copy of the book *The Unnecessary Pastor*. The title did not sound very appealing or encouraging. Our first thought was that if the pastors are that unnecessary in a church, why do we spend so much time and money to get a degree to become pastors? Our daughters perceived their dad as "the old ladies' pet," as they were the ones who were fond of their pastor and dad and laughed at our outdated jokes. Eugene Peterson and Marva Dawn observe in this book, "The clergy and churches are in crisis today in large part due to an identity crisis in how the culture, congregations, and the clergy themselves view and regard their respective call, role, and function."[9]

It was challenging to minister to an aging congregation. Shepherds generally find it difficult to feed God's flock through biblical preaching in an unconducive society. Haddon Robinson explains the devaluation of preaching.

[9] https://anglican.ink/2017/02/13/review-the-unnecessary-pastor/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> In our days, the image of preachers changed. They are neither regarded as intellectual nor as spiritual leaders in their communities. Our society is saturated with over-communication. Church members receive a hundred thousand messages daily through Mass Media. Preachers cannot compete with the advertisements on television. For some Christians, charitable work and social action are more appealing than listening or talking. Amid these challenges, a shepherd finds it hard to feed the flock through Biblical Preaching.[10]

Despite how we are perceived in the pulpit and the negative mindset towards preaching, we shall not give up preaching the whole counsel of God, which is essential for the spiritual nurture of God's flock that we are called to feed, care for, and protect. The writers of the New Testament saw firsthand how the preaching of the Good News changed the scorers of the Jews and the Gentiles. God powerfully used the apostle Peter's message to save 3,000 people in one day.

What Is Biblical Preaching?

In this section, we aim to explore what constitutes biblical preaching and its relation to expository preaching to support our recommendation of preaching through the books of the Bible as a preferred way of nurturing God's flock. The following interview between Craig Brian Larson and Haddon Robinson explains what biblical preaching is and what it is not.

> Larson: When Jesus taught, He didn't go verse by verse through an Old Testament book. Neither did Peter or Paul, at least in their epistles. There aren't any Scriptures that tell us how to preach biblically. How do we decide what that means? Based on Robinson's response, there are three markers to determine whether our preaching is biblical.
>
> First, the answer to what biblical preaching is must come from our theology of Scripture. You may preach theology on a Sunday morning, but is that theology faithful to the Word of God?
>
> Second, is it true to the purposes of the Bible? The primary purpose of the Bible is to reveal God. It is not a book about me and my problems. It is a revelation of God. If a sermon ends up being all about me and my issues and what I want, it may be popular, but it is not true to the purpose of the Scriptures. Even if it draws upon 50 verses, it's not

[10] Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Publishing Group, 2014), p. 2.

> entirely biblical. A sermon may be "profitable" if I give you verses that appear to talk about how to invest your money. You learn to invest your money, but it doesn't tell you anything significant about God. It isn't beneficial for godliness. Biblical preaching is God-centered, not person-centered or wallet-centered.
>
> Third, is my application to people today aligned with what the biblical writer says to his readers? Since sermons must deal with the application, they have to deal with how I take the truth in a particular situation in the ancient world and apply it to the people of today. Some sermons start with the application and then go back into the Bible for support. For instance, it's instructive to look at the sermons on both sides about slavery in the nineteenth century. The preachers started with a position on holding slaves or freeing slaves and then went back into the biblical text and were absolutely sure the biblical text supported it.[11]

According to Robinson, a sermon is biblical if its theology is faithful to God's Word. Does it remain accurate to the purposes of the Bible and its application to people aligned with what the biblical writer says to his readers? Keeping these three markers in mind helps shepherds to preach biblically based sermons. A sermon is biblical when it is Christ-centered, shares Steven J. Lawson from the life of the 19th century minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

> This "Prince of Preachers" believed that Christ must be the centerpiece of every sermon. Whatever his passage, Spurgeon announces, "I take my text and make a beeline to the cross." A sermon without Christ, Spurgeon insisted, is a graceless sermon. Such a sermon, he maintained, has no good news to declare: "A sermon without Christ, it is an awful, a horrible thing. It is an empty well, a cloud without rain; it is a tree twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Giving men stones for bread and scorpions for eggs is abominable, yet they do so who preach not Jesus. A sermon without Christ! It is a loaf of bread without any flour in it. How can it feed the soul? Men die and perish because Christ is not there.[12]

This premise of Charles Spurgeon presents the question: What are we feeding the flock that God has entrusted to us? Are our sermons filled with "stones and scorpions," metaphorically

[11] https://www.preachingtoday.com/exegesis/foundations-of-exegesis/what-biblical-preaching-is-and-isnt.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[12] Lawson, Steven J. *The Kind of Preaching God Blesses.* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), p. 32.

speaking, or the bread of life, Jesus, the one who can only satisfy a hungry soul? To challenge preachers to present what only Jesus can offer, Martyn Lloyd-Jones shared about the miracle at the Beautiful Gate at the Temple where a beggar expected money, but he got much more. Peter offered the beggar something better, saying, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, get up and walk! (Act 3:4) Lloyd-Jones further remarks, "Peter's statement reminds us that there is a negative aspect to it. Certain things we are not to do. But then there is that special task that we are equipped to do, which we are called to do, and which we are enabled to do." [13]

Martin Lloyd-Jones explains what a sermon is and what is not,

> First, the sermon is not to consist merely of topical comments gleaned from newspapers, political matters, or even from novels the preacher reads. Secondly, a sermon is not a moral essay or a discussion on ethical principles with an appeal, a call, and an urging to a particular ethical behavior. Thirdly, a sermon is not to be one of general uplift, a kind of treatment. It may use Christian terminology, but it evacuates it of its real meaning. Fourthly, the sermon's content is what is called in the N.T.," "The Word." Preach the Word, preach the Gospel, or the whole counsel of God. That being interpreted means the message of the Bible, the message of the Scriptures. The message should be divided into two critical parts, It should contain evangelistic or the message of salvation, calling people to repent and turn to God and have faith in Jesus Christ. The message should also be edifying, which is teaching the "building up of the saints."[14]

According to Lloyd-Jones, preachers need to preach sermons that contain a clear Gospel message calling sinners to turn to Christ and encouraging believers to desire God more. Heading this scholar's views helps fulfill the dual task of a shepherd: calling people to repentance and equipping the saints for work of service. Donald Sunukjian highlights the task of a preacher and helps pastors work through the dilemma of what makes preaching biblical.

> The Bible is God's voice, spanning the ages. The role of the biblical preacher is to echo that voice in this generation. Specifically, the preacher's task is to present the biblical

[13] Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers.* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011), p. 69.

[14] Lloyd-James, *Preaching*, pp. 71-73.

> text's true and exact meaning (look at what God is saying). In a manner that is relevant to the contemporary listener (to us).[15]
>
> When discussing this kind of biblical preaching, the old textual, topical, and expository distinctions are not helpful. Those distinctions were based on the amount of biblical material and where it was drawn. If it is a single verse, it is textual. Suppose there are passages from different biblical books; it is topical. If it is sequential paragraphs through a particular book, it is expository. Today, we define true biblical preaching by how the biblical material is treated that is, faithful to the meaning and flow of the original author and relevant to the contemporary listener. Any of the above approaches can be a biblical message.[16]

According to John Stott, biblical preaching is "to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey Him."[17] Lloyd-Jones draws a similar conclusion; after asserting a sermon is neither an essay nor a lecture, he emphatically remarks, "A sermon should always be expository."[18] For us, biblical preaching involves studying the context of a passage, understanding its message, and eliciting principles to share with the listeners. It is preaching the whole counsel of God.

Good Preaching According to Sunukjian

According to Donald Sunukjian, good preaching shows the following characteristics:

1. It enables us to reach more people with God's truth in less time since it occurs at the largest gathering of the church.
2. It allows us to say things honestly and sometimes bluntly, knowing that someone, in the anonymity of a crowd, will ponder and receive our words, whereas that person might angrily reject them if said face-to-face.
3. It builds our credibility for other pastoral (e.g., counseling) and leadership (e.g., church board) activities.

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[15] Sunukjian, Donald R. *Biblical Preaching.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), p. 10.

[16] Sunukjian, *Biblical, p.* 13.

[17] Robinson, Haddon & Larson, Craig B. *Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), p. 24.

[18] Lloyd-Jones*, Preaching,* pp. 81-82.

4. It is usually the initial point of contact that encourages visitors to return.
5. It brings excitement and anticipation to the whole church.[19]

Sunukjian further annotates,

> Biblical preaching is the best thing we can do for our ministries, and it's the best thing we can do for our lives. To drink deeply of the Word of God, to saturate ourselves with its truths, to have our lives changed by its transforming power, and then to stand before God's people, proclaiming with joy and confidence, "Look at what God is saying to us!" Who could be called to anything greater?[20]

When we, as preachers, are not being transformed by God's Word and applying its teachings in our lives, we are disqualified to be in the pulpit preaching God's Word. First, we must come under its transforming power before proclaiming it to others.

After researching from various experts, we agree that biblical preaching is indeed expository preaching. When biblical preaching is adequately done by presenting the truth and the meaning of the biblical text in a manner relevant to contemporary society, it benefits both the preacher and the listeners. Those benefits include their love for God, His Word, and for his people will increase. Biblical preaching honors and glorifies God and produces well-equipped witnesses for Christ. As Sunukjian says, "Such preaching is the hardest and the best thing we will ever do."[21]

The Importance of Expository Preaching

Haddon Robinson explains the importance of expository preaching in his book, *Biblical Preaching.* "This book is about expository preaching, but it may have been written for a

[19] Sunukjian, *Biblical*, p. 15.

[20] Sunukjian, *Biblical*, p. 15.

[21] Sunukjian, *Biblical*, p. 15.

depressed market. Not everyone agrees that expository preaching, or any preaching, for that matter, is an urgent need of the church."[22] He further affirms,

> Ministers can proclaim anything in a stained-glass voice at 11:30 on Sunday morning following the singing of hymns. Yet when they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority. No longer do they confront their hearers with a word from God. God is not in it. Through preaching the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation and the richness and ripeness of Christian character. The preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository.[23]

According to Haddon Robinson,

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.[24]

Robinson is considered one of the best exponents of the Bible in our times who came up with a comprehensive definition of expository preaching. However, we have a hard time fully embracing this definition. We would like to critically assess this definition by breaking it into two sections.

Expository Preaching According to Haddon Robinson

The first part of Robinson's definition affirms, "It is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context."[25] Preaching is a laborious process that calls for careful study and tools to

[22] Robinson, *Biblical*, p. 1.

[23] Robinson, *Biblical*, pp. 2-4.

[24] Robinson, *Biblical,* p. 5.

[25] Robinson, *Biblical,* p. 5.

interpret, understand, and preach God's life-giving Word, which is supposed to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

We often find it hard to consistently go through this rigorous discipline before we preach from a passage from the Bible. That hard work is worth it, as we are committed to bringing life-changing messages to help our congregants become effective witnesses. However, this process might be complicated for many pastors who do not have easy access to these biblical interpretation tools. We have a concern about the many poor pastors in Malawi and Nagaland in the Northeast of India. How could they ever preach sermons meeting this criterion?

Though expository preaching is highly recommended and practiced in several Western churches, tools for such preaching remain out of reach, and they are often extremely costly for many pastors and believers worldwide. Moreover, several of them are not well-educated. This calls for pastors in Western churches who are equipped with biblical interpretation tools to invest in training the pastors in underprivileged countries to preach biblical sermons in an expository way, as one of our Presbyterian pastor friends does with Malawian and Romanian pastors.

The second part of this definition states, “Which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” We applied this principle of letting the Holy Spirit first work in us and through us in our listeners since we began to preach at age 18. Yet, we could not access the biblical interpretation tools. All we had was a Bible in *Telugu*, an Indian language directly translated from Hebrew and Greek. We would open the Bible and read, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten our understanding. It was like letting God speak to our heart through a particular passage, giving us its meaning and context.

Once we derived a principle from that biblical understanding, we would apply it to our life and then try to live it out before we could preach it to others. It would undoubtedly benefit preachers and their hearers if we could use the tools and follow the discipline of expository preaching. Nevertheless, one could still preach inspiring messages without the tools when they come to the Author and the Inspirer of the Bible—the Holy Spirit—with an open heart. Nonetheless, preaching in an expository way keeps us balanced in the Scriptures and helps us avoid the pitfalls of preaching.

If our messages are academic, they satisfy the minds. If they are witty, they merely entertain the listeners. On the other hand, when they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, they help the souls. We affirm that expository preaching is the work of the Holy Spirit, which first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher. Through the preacher, applies to the listeners.

Robinson moves from defining expository preaching to its necessity in churches, and in preachers' lives,

> Expository preaching at its core is more a philosophy than a method. Whether we can be called expositors starts with our purpose and our honest answer to the question: Do you, as a preacher, endeavor to bend your thought to the Scriptures, or do you use the Scriptures to support your thought?[26]

Why is Expository Preaching Essential in Churches?

To answer this question, we must examine some compelling arguments on the necessity of expository preaching in our churches from two proponents of our times. Haddon Robinson sustains,

> Despite the bad-mouthing of preaching and preachers, no one who takes the Bible seriously should count preaching out. To the New Testament writers, preaching was the

[26] Robinson, *Biblical*, p. 5.

> event through which God works. When preachers speak as heralds, they must cry out "the Word." Anything less cannot legitimately pass for Christian preaching.[27]

As heralds, we must preach as if we are speaking the very words of God. We ought to follow Paul's advice in our shepherding. "Preach the Word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not, patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching." (2 Tim 4:2) Preaching, correcting, rebuking, and encouraging are all part of shepherding.

Another strong argument for expository preaching comes from John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church. He is considered among the top 25 influential pastors in the past 25 years.[28] In his foreword of the book *The Kind of Preaching God Blesses*, MacArthur states,

> For the faithful preacher, the advice of Paul to Timothy majestically stands out as sacred ground. It is precious territory for every pastor who desires to proclaim God's Word faithfully. In 2 Tim 4:2, the apostle defined the primary mandate for God-honoring church ministry for Timothy and all who would come after him. The minister of the Gospel is called to "preach the Word." The faithful expositor understands that Scripture is no ordinary book. The power of the pulpit is in the word preached, as the Spirit uses His Word preached, as the Spirit uses His sword to pierce human hearts.
>
> This sacred book is "inspired by God," or more literally, God-breathed. It is not only powerful to save but also to sanctify. Consequently, the pastor's task is to faithfully feed the flock with the pure milk of the word (1 P 2:1-3), trusting God for the growth. With such a comprehensive work of both salvation and sanctification available through the power of the Scriptures, why would anyone be tempted to preach anything else? The pastor who cares about the spiritual growth of his people must make God and His Word the centerpiece of his ministry. To do that, he must preach the Word.[29]

As shepherds, our primary vocation is to preach the Word. God's Word is "For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." (Heb

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[27] Robinson, *Biblical*, pp. 2-3.

[28] https://www.preaching.com/articles/the-25-most-influential-pastors-of-the-past-25-years/ (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[29] Lawson, *The Kind*, pp. 7, 8.

4:12) God's Word cuts through the hearts of both the preacher and the listener. A preacher must let the Holy Spirit cut away things that displease God.

The State of Christianity in the United States

The following statistics help us understand the current state of Christianity in the USA. "Christianity is the most prevalent religion in the United States. Estimates from 2021 suggest that of the entire U.S. population (332 million), about 63% is Christian (210 million)."[30] The following numbers come from Christianity Today, "According to National Congregations Study (NCS), the number of congregations in the U.S. increased from 336,000 in 1998 to a peak of 414,000 in 2006 but then leveled off at 384,000 in 2012."[31]

When we first came to the USA in 2005, we often wondered why the church in the USA had a minimal impact on society despite these vast numbers of Christians and congregations. Is the Scripture not being preached at all, or is the art of expository preaching lost in the pulpits of American churches? The latter seems to be more of a problem. Thomas R. Schreiner, in his article "The Problem with Much Preaching Today—And Biblical Theology as the Remedy," discusses the effects of a lack of biblical preaching.

> Conservative churches may embrace the inerrancy of Scripture but still deny the sufficiency of God's Word in practice. We may say that Scripture is God's inerrant Word, yet still fail to proclaim it earnestly from our pulpits. Many evangelical churches today have a famine for the Word of God. Sermon series feature in their titles television shows. Preaching focuses on steps to a successful marriage and raising children in our culture.
>
> Our pastors turn into moralists like "Dear Abby," advising on how to live a happy life week after week. Pastors also believe they must fill their sermons with stories and illustrations so that the anecdotes flesh out the moral point enunciated. Every good

[30] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_the_United_States (Accessed January 12, 2024).

[31] https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/september/how-many-churches-in-america-us-nones-nondenominational.html (Accessed January 12, 2024).

> preacher will use illustrations. But sermons can become so chock-full of stories that they are bereft of any theology.
>
> As pastors, we are responsible for proclaiming "the whole counsel of God" (Act 20:27). We cannot rely on congregational polling to determine whether we are fulfilling our calling. We must depend on what the Scriptures demand. We may cook a heresy recipe if we assess our preaching by what congregations desire. I am not saying that our congregations are heretical, only that God's Word rather than popular opinion must be the test of faithfulness. Pastors' calling is to feed the flock with God's Word, not to please people with what they desire to hear.
>
> According to Shreiner, what happens when pastors fail in their calling to preach the whole counsel of God and feed our congregations with a steady diet of moralistic preaching? They may learn to be kind, forgiving, loving, and a good husband or wife (all good things, of course!). Their hearts may be warmed and even enlightened. But as long as the theological foundation is neglected, the wolf of heresy lurks ever more closely. How? Not because the pastor himself is heretical. He may be fully orthodox and faithful in his theology. Yet he assumes theology in all his preaching and so neglects to preach to his people the storyline and theology of the Bible.[32]

Schreiner's article highlights that several pastors fail in their shepherding role to preach biblical preaching in an expository way. In doing so, they are not feeding their congregations with truth and not equipping them with tools to withstand the attacks of the wolves that come in the form of false teachers and conspiracy teachings.

As an example of a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding and biblical preaching, which might be producing biblically illiterate witnesses in our churches, this is a story that happened in our family. It was our first Sunday attending a small Baptist Church that had only a few older adults and no children. Looking at them, our daughter Jemimah was seven, said Papa, "India has more Christians than in America." No wonder she felt that way; we were part of a 1,500-person church in India. Are the musings of a seven-year-old any indication of the state of Christianity in the USA?

[32] https://www.9marks.org/article/preaching-and-biblical-theology-101-pbt-101/ (Accessed January 13, 2024

We may have an impressive membership on record, but on a Sunday morning, only a few are in attendance. Why is there such a decline in church attendance in a country that is perceived as a Christian nation by outsiders? Could that be due to a lack of biblical/expository preaching? The article, "Biblical Exposition: Becoming a Lost Art," provides reasons for such decline.

> Christian leaders say a lack of good pulpit work is a big reason for society's moral decline. Over 3,000 pastors and lay leaders from ten nations attended a national Congress on Biblical Exposition (COBE) in Anaheim, California, which served to encourage but also to warn the American church community. An urgent message surfaced in its major sessions. That message was that the church must return to true biblical preaching, or the Western world will continue its descent toward valueless culture.
>
> Ray Stedman, Palo Alto, California's Peninsula Bible Church pastor, chaired the Anaheim COBE. Some leaders in attendance perceive that the Bible has been misused or not used in recent years. Stedman said surveys indicate more than 75 percent of the churches in America are no longer growing or are experiencing a decline in membership. Stedman added that most who have stopped attending cite "boring and irrelevant worship services" as the reason.
>
> Highly respected theologian John Stott, one of the conference attendees, made clear in his opening remarks to COBE that while good preaching is essential, it is not a magical cure for society's problems. After all, he said, it would be safe to say that if there were an epitaph on the tomb of the children of Israel, it would have probably been, "They wouldn't listen." But the emphasis at COBE was on preaching.
>
> In one seminar, author and sociologist Os Guinness said America is utterly exceptional in the community of nations because of its deep religious roots and opportunity for public expression of faith. But in all my studies, I have yet to see a Western society where the church pews are full, and the sermons are so empty.
>
> He continued with four possible outcomes for the future of American Christianity. First, faith will wither in the sun of liberal secularism; second, faith will wither gradually in a period of its own crisis and decline; third, evangelicalism will stabilize but will be exploited by the political right for its own purposes.
>
> Fourth, Christianity will be revitalized as a way of life through revival. He said the fourth scenario won't happen unless the Word is made relevant and preached profoundly.[33]

[33] https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1986/april-18/biblical-exposition-becoming-lost-art.html (Accessed January 13, 2024).

Restoring the Art of Expository Preaching in The Pulpit

Politicians and social media experts understand the power of a platform where their ideas, values, products, and policies are widely offered and communicated to the public. Similarly, shepherds are given a platform called "pulpit" each Sunday. Yet they seem to not understand its power nor use it effectively to communicate the essential truths of the Bible. Steven J. Lawson comments on how to restore the art of expository preaching in pulpits,

> Lawson laments that present-day preaching is void of the person and the work of Christ. Many preachers may be compelling in their communication and captivate the attention of their listeners, but if they fail to exalt Jesus in their sermons, they have missed the mark. The need of the hour is that preachers passionately declare Christ as the Son of the Living God and the only Savior of sinners in the pulpits. This sacred duty will only be fulfilled when every preacher proclaims the whole counsel of God and teaches the truth of the Scripture. God blesses the preacher and the listeners when the supremacy of Christ has expounded adequately in the pulpits. If preachers are to be known for anything, they must be known for preaching the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified.[34]

According to Lawson, however energetic and exciting a sermon may be, it is like a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal if it lacks Christ. The sad reality is that such sermons lack the power to save and sanctify sinners. We agree with Lawson's observations and suggestions on regaining the lost art of expository preaching. If we want to see believers become vital witnesses for Christ in our communities, we must endeavor to restore the sanctity of pulpits. If we are not truthful to the biblical text and rely on the Holy Spirit, we might preach our own messages instead of God's.

The Journey Toward Expository Preaching

As a young Christian, the author of this thesis-project was fascinated by studying biblical characters and tried to emulate their faith. His preaching primarily consisted of topical messages such as prayer, faith, love, grace, joy, etc. He has used expository preaching at HCS after

[34] Lawson, *The* Kind, pp. 23-26.

learning about it and its impact during his MDIV studies at GCTS. Lawson's further explanation on restoring expository preaching resonates with him.

> What must be recovered in our day is the preaching that God blesses. In every pulpit, the Lord Jesus must be presented as more than a mere infallible teacher and a moral example. Pulpits must be myopically focused upon declaring the sinless humanity, sovereign deity, and saving purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ. Otherwise, what comes from pulpits is mere preaching, but simply religious talk.[35]

It would also be helpful in our shepherding to pay attention to Robinson's advice.

> Before we proclaim the message of the Bible to others, we should live that message ourselves. Regrettably, many preachers fail as Christians before they fail as preachers because they do not think biblically. Many ministers, who profess high regard for the Scriptures, prepare their sermons without consulting the Bible. True preaching comes when the loving heart and the disciplined mind are laid at the disposal of the Holy Spirit.[36]

Preaching Through the Books of the Bible

When there were no iPhone and long-distance phone calls were expensive in India, there was an eager wait for a long letter from Wilma when we she was engaged to be married to the researcher. She would use every inch of the paper to communicate her love and how they were to get ready for their upcoming wedding. Upon receiving the long-awaited letter, then he would search for a quiet place to read it and re-read it several times. Similarly, the Bible is God's love letter to humanity, where God communicates His love and the way we conduct our lives, serve, and worship Him reading, meditating, and preaching through books of the Bible is essential for the welfare of God's flock.

[35] Lawson, *The Kind*, p. 24.

[36] Robinson, *Biblical*, p. 9.

Reasons to Preach Through the Books of the Bible

The first reason to preach through the books of the Bible is that God has preserved and protected His Word over the centuries so that every generation can read and hear about His love and purpose for them. Our approach to the Bible should not be as if we are reading a collection of books but God's Word itself. A reliable Christian online resource, *Got Questions.org,* shares this point of view about the Bible.

> If the Bible is God's Word, we should cherish it, study it, obey it, and fully trust it. If the Bible is indeed the Word of God, then it is the final authority for all matters of faith, practice, and morality. If the Bible is the Word of God, then to dismiss it is to ignore God Himself. The fact that God gave us the Bible proves His love for us. God communicated to humanity what He is like and how we can have a relationship with Him. We could not have known these things had God not revealed them to us in the Bible. The Bible contains everything humanity needs to know about God to have a relationship with Him.[37]

The second reason states that we preach from all books of the Bible because "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Some might ask why the trouble of preaching from all the books of the Bible. For instance, what can contemporary believers learn from the book of Leviticus, which contains ceremonial purification rules and regulations of the Israelites? To respond to this question, we must ask ourselves, did Jesus see it essential to read and even quote from Leviticus? The second of the two most important commandments that Jesus referred to in Mark 12:29-31 comes from Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." If Jesus had referred to Leviticus, we, too, can indeed preach from Leviticus. We have not preached through the book of

[37] https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-God-Word.html (Accessed January 13, 2024).

Leviticus, but we have shared some principles from it in our sermons. For more references to Leviticus in the New Testament, refer to "Wednesday in the Word" online.[38]

The third reason to consider is that preaching through the books of the Bible is essential for the spiritual growth of God's flock because it gives them the whole counsel of God. Lawson writes, "To fulfill this sacred duty, every preacher must proclaim the full counsel of God. Every doctrine in Scripture must be delivered. Every truth must be taught. Every sin must be exposed. Every warning must be issued. And every promise must be offered."[39] Lawson further laments the modern day's shallow preaching that lacks God's whole counsel and its adverse effects on God's flock.

> What passes for preaching in many of today's pulpits is little more than sermonettes for Christianettes. No doubt you know precisely the kind of preaching I am referring to: 20-minute pep talks filled with shallow cliches, self-help snippets, and bumper-sticker slogans. Worse than their superficial delivery, though, is their shallow doctrine. Such performances are therapeutic but rarely theological. They are amusing but not arresting, and they are clever but not converting. Their anemic message is so empty that they in no way declare the biblical text listed in the worship program. Soul-starved listeners are left to ask, "Is this all there is?" Such spiritual junk food, sadly, has become the main entrée for many emaciated congregations.
>
> The result is that countless churches are left weak, worldly, and worse, unconverted. When preaching sinks to the low level of being little more than trendy talks about temporal trivialities, the congregation's spiritual life is in triage. The people stand in desperate need of being rushed to the emergency room and put on life support.[40]

This is the state of the congregations where there is a scarcity of wholesome biblical preaching. Shepherds must preach through the books of the Bible to bring the whole counsel of God to feed and equip the congregation for the "works of service." (Eph 4:11)

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[38] https://www.wednesdayintheword.com/leviticus-newtestament/ (Accessed January 13, 2024).

[39] Lawson, *The Kind*, p. 25.

[40] Lawson, *The Kind*, p. 36.

The fourth reason is that preaching through the books of the Bible helps God's flock survive during a spiritual famine. "The time is surely coming, says the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine on the land not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the Lord." (Am 8:11) "People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from border to border, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. Beautiful girls and strong young men will grow faint in that day, thirsting for the Lord's word." (Am 8:11-13) It would be prudent for the shepherds of God's flock to heed this prophecy of another shepherd, Amos, in 750 B.C. We have to fill God's storehouses (churches) with wholesome messages from the books of the Bible so that God's flock would survive a spiritual famine.

In his book *Famine in the Land*, Steven Lawson shows how to avoid preaching a watered-down Gospel. "The famine of the Word continues in massive proportions in most places in North America. Indeed, we live in such days of drought when many forces suffocate biblical preaching. Now more than ever, pastors must return to their highest calling, the divine summons to "preach the word." (2 Tim 4:2)[41]

> Lawson challenges, "Where's the Beef?"
>
> The contemporary church seems bent on presenting a non-offensive, felt-need message, a sad departure from the model shown in Acts. Delivering a watered-down, man-centered message only retards the spiritual hunger of true believers for the meat of God's Word. Instead of serving a full-course meal of God's truth, many evangelical pastors have only prolonged this low spiritual desire by offering spiritual junk food of human philosophies and worldly thinking. Such spiritual junk food, full of "all kinds of artificial preservatives and …unnatural substitutes, wrote Walter Kaiser, has resulted in theological and biblical malnutrition…and a worldwide spiritual famine (due to) the absence of any genuine proclamation of the Word of God.[42]

[41] Lawson, Steven J. *Famine in the Land.* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), p. 18.

[42] Lawson, *Famine*, p. 45.

> Tragically, many pastors cater to their people today, sometimes under the guise of reaching lost people, rather than catering to them with the steak of Scripture. Pastors must avoid this well-intentioned but misdirected trend. They must once again deliver the truth and nothing but the truth to eager hearts who wait to be fed the unsearchable riches of Christ. Anything less is a compromise.[43]

Our belief in preaching through all the books of the Bible was further strengthened by reading an interview of Kevin Halloran with Tim Sattler, the International Training Director of WordPartners, where he talks about consecutive expository preaching and its benefits.

> Tim Sattler defines consecutive expository preaching as preaching through all the books of the Bible. It is an approach that remembers each book of the Bible has a central message intended by the author. To understand the message, you need to understand the whole, not just the parts. It's not a definition that says, you have to preach so many verses a week, this few or that many—it's really unfolding the whole book and communicating the author's message, not ours. To do that, we must see the book in its entirety. Consecutive exposition is mainly making sure that you're preaching through an entire book because that's the way God communicated the book. He didn't give us just verses or segments. He gave us a message through an author to an audience. And we have to know what that entire message is.[44]

Reasons for Consecutive Expository Preaching

> 1. *Consecutive exposition demonstrates confidence in the authority of the Bible*. Tim: The Bible sits over us, not we over it. If we are not telling the story or message the way God gave it, we are putting ourselves above the Bible—picking and choosing.
>
> 2. *Consecutive exposition is the way that most accurately communicates God's message to us*.
> Tim: God has spoken His Word in the way He wants it to be heard. The best way to share what God has given us is to preach the books God has given us and not just pick and choose passages here and there from other books. I think many people believe the Bible is just a collection of verses, and they don't know how they all connect.
>
> *3. Consecutive exposition helps the congregation read the Bible better.*
> Tim: This needs to be a goal in preaching every week. As you explain the text, one of your goals is to show the simplicity of reading the Bible for those in the pew. If it's done well, it becomes a model of how one should approach and read the Bible.

[43] Lawson, *Famine*, p. 45.

[44] https://wordpartners.org/resources/eight-reasons-why-consecutive-expository-preaching-is-needed/ (Accessed May 16, 2023).

4. Consecutive exposition forces preachers to tackle tough topics.
Tim: Some preachers don't want to preach about sin, idolatry, immorality, or money, and this forces preachers to tackle the subject as it comes along. Also, when sensitive pastoral issues happen in your church, somebody might sit there and think, "Oh, he's preaching that because I'm going through this." They can't say that if it's the next thing in the text."

Kevin: This gives the pastor freedom; he doesn't need to worry about potential accusations or confusion about why certain things are coming up. I agree with this reason. I preached on 1 & 2 Corinthians for several weeks. Various passages lent themselves to address sensitive issues such as sexual immorality, homosexuality, anger, adultery, abuse, etc. Because I preached through both letters, I didn't find anyone challenging me or the sermon afterward.

5. *Consecutive exposition makes it easier to schedule preaching series and get the most out of prep time.*
Here is a summary of why Tim and Kevin think that consecutive exposition makes putting together a series preaching schedule easier: Preaching a one-time sermon each week could be more challenging and time-consuming. To communicate the literary context to the congregation, you need to know how it fits into the story of the whole message of the book. Whereas consecutive preaching of the whole book systematically would help you plan your preaching schedule for months, allowing you more strategic prep time. Having a sermon schedule is beneficial; however, you must be flexible to move away from it to address any pastoral issues that may come up in the congregation, like death or a national crisis such as the 9/11 attack.

6. *Consecutive exposition helps people see the overall story of Scripture.*
Tim: So much preaching is disconnected from the overall story of the Bible. There seems to be a resurgence to try and get back to that. It's essential to connect people to biblical history. It connects people to what God is doing in the world today.
Kevin: This is crucial for developing a biblical worldview in our people, seeing each book in Scripture in terms of the whole story because it is the story of humanity, the story we are a part of today.

7. Consecutive exposition preaches the whole counsel of God, allowing preachers to have a clean conscience before God.
Kevin: When Paul gave his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:26-27, he said, "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Paul preached the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, which brought him freedom and a clear conscience. He didn't have to worry. Paul's preaching reaffirms our belief in preaching the whole counsel of God.

8. Consecutive exposition removes potential distractions.
Tim: Someone says to you on a Sunday morning, "I feel like you were in my living room last night." I was in counseling with you on Thursday and became the illustration of your

> sermon on Sunday." Consecutive preaching removes obstacles of people from saying, "He's talking about me to them" rather than, "Oh, he's talking directly to me because this passage was here for me today.[45]

This interview between Tim Sattler and Kevin Halloran strengthened our resolve to preach through all the books of the Bible. In the long run, this approach benefits both the preacher and the members. Preaching through the books of the Bible is biblical as it aims to give the members the BIG picture of God's purpose for the nations and humanity.

The Advantages and Challenges of Expository Preaching

In general, several pastors, understand biblical preaching is expository preaching through the books of the Bible. However, the following counterarguments to expository preaching are worth noting. They are taken from an article in *Christianity Today*.

> In the 1986 National Congress on Biblical Exposition (COBE), while many participants agreed on the importance of expository preaching, some questioned the premise that American pastors had abandoned expository preaching. One speaker, who preferred anonymity, said the notion that moral decline is directly related to poor biblical exposition is too general and precludes determining to what extent secular culture is drowning out the message. John Perkins, the director of the Foundation for Reconciliation and Development, emphasized preaching and acting on God's Word. You could find a lot of Bible preaching going on right now in South Africa, but I doubt whether the application theology is being taught. The general conference highlighted the role of expository preaching in the renewal of local churches.[46]

Despite the counterarguments on expository preaching, we firmly believe there is a need to preach through the books of the Bible as there is so much biblical illiteracy among our church members. For instance, we referenced the book of Habakkuk during one Sunday sermon. After

[45] Halloran, Kevin & Sattler, Tim. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrnxQ5qH2U8 (Accessed January 13, 2024) https://wordpartners.org/resources/eight-reasons-why-consecutive-expository-preaching-is-needed/ (May 16, 2023).

[46] https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1986/april-18/biblical-exposition-becoming-lost-art.html (Accessed January 13, 2024).

the service, one lady approached us and said, “Pastor, can I find that book on Amazon?” When told that it was right here in the Bible, she had and expression of sheer amazement!

The advantages of expository preaching are as follows:

1. The context and the content of a Bible passage are presented clearly and concisely to the congregation so they would get the BIG idea of that passage.

2. The shepherd is focused and remains centered on the sermon’s subject.

3. Expository preaching helps the shepherd feed the flock with the whole counsel of God systematically.

4. Expository preaching helps the shepherd and the flock avoid extreme theologies.

5. It helps the preacher and congregation understand how each book of the Bible contributes to God’s redemptive work.

The challenges of expository preaching may include:

1. Because of its laborious nature, the shepherd can get exhausted and may quit preaching the expository way.

2. The truths in a particular Bible passage may not address the current struggles of the congregants.

3. In the attempt to remain faithful to the passage, the shepherd can come across as dull and boring to the hearers.

4. By limiting the message to a specific passage, a particular topic in that passage may not be fully dealt with at the time of presentation.

5. May diminish the “suspense” factor since the congregation can predict what’s coming next.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by examining the case we presented for preaching through the books of the Bible. We consulted and interacted with various experts and looked at their works. We have presented definitions of biblical preaching and what is not, as well as expository preaching. We concluded with the advantages and challenges of expository preaching. The understanding we gained through the engagement with various authors of books and Christian leaders, further strengthened our argument on why preaching through the books of the Bible, in the long run, is better for the overall spiritual nourishment of God's flock.

Our job as shepherds is never to forget what Jesus commands Peter—to feed the flock, and the task of preaching through the books of the Bible fulfills that goal. As we remain faithful to that under-shepherding task, we will receive a rich reward when the Chief Shepherd appears (2 P 5:4).

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methods used to determine the veracity of the hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. It closes with a summary of the key findings. When we ask pastors and various ministry leaders about biblical illiteracy in the USA, the answer is always a "Yes." We surveyed a small group to determine whether biblical illiteracy is a concern.

Research Design

The research project consisted of two parts. The first one was the development of a survey. The second part was the personal interviews with some pastors. The methodology included a survey conducted through Survey Monkey in the first part of the project; personal, email, and Zoom interviews with various pastors, mainly in the New England region. The purpose was to ascertain how regular church members of different ages and genders in multiple churches view biblical literacy and Scripture engagement. A questionnaire was sent to 120 Christians, primarily to church members, the laity, and a few pastors.

The Survey

The survey was titled “Biblical Literacy and Scripture Engagement”. The 22 questions included were the following.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your marital status?
4. How long have you been a Christian?
5. What is your denominational background?
6. How long have you been attending a church?
7. How frequently do you attend a church?
8. Is there an ongoing discipleship program at your church?
9. What is the nature of the discipleship program?
10. How often do you read the Bible or listen to an audio Bible?
11. Do you follow a Bible reading plan?
12. What has been the pattern of reading your Bible?
13. How many times have you read through the whole Bible?
14. What version of the Bible do you read?
15. When I read the Bible, I am
16. The Holy Spirit inspires all Scripture:
17. I don’t read the Bible because
18. Can you discern truth from error because of your knowledge of Scripture?
19. How are your opinions about right living informed?
20. In your opinion, is biblical illiteracy an issue?

21. What is contributing to biblical illiteracy among Christians?

22. What suggestions do you have to reduce biblical illiteracy?

The questionnaire addressed three categories.

1. Demographics (age, gender, denomination)
2. Church involvement (church attendance, Bible reading, and discipleship practices)
3. Scripture engagement (daily application of Scripture)

A total of 106 out of 120 responded to the questions related to biblical illiteracy, its causes, and how it can be reduced.

The Findings of the Survey

Demographics

The survey only covered a minimum age group of 18 and above for consent reasons. Most respondents were aged between 41 and over 60 years. Of the 106 respondents, 56 were male, 50 were female, 75 were married, 24 were single, and seven were divorced.

Christian Experience and Denominational Background

Of the 101 respondents, 73 have been Christians for over 30 years, 21 were between 10 and 20 years, and seven were between one and five years. Denominations include Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Evangelical Church, Charismatic, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Congregational, Methodist, and Church of Christ.

Of 101 respondents, Baptists were 30, Pentecostals were 16, and 78 attended church over 20 years, followed by ten between 10-20 years. For 86 of them, attending church is a weekly affair; for 13, it was a sporadic occurrence.

Discipleship Program and Bible Reading

Of 100 respondents, 15 said no, and 85 said there was an ongoing discipleship program at their church. For 38 out of 83, discipleship consists of studying books by Christian authors, reading Bible texts, and watching sermon videos. However, for 31 studying biblical texts was of prime importance. For 80 out of 94, reading the Bible was a daily practice.

Interestingly, 53 did not have a reading plan, while 41 did follow a plan. Regarding the pattern of reading the Bible, out of 92 respondents, 29 read the Bible book by book, while 22 followed a chronological Bible reading plan.

Twenty-one of them let their mood determine their reading. Ten follow a consistent reading of three to four chapters daily, while the other ten read through various Bible genres. Regarding reading the Bible, out of 94, thirty-three said three to five times, 21 read once, and fifteen never fully read the Bible. Eleven of them completed the Bible twice, and fourteen of them were reading it every year. Our concern is for those 15 who never fully read the Bible.

Fifty-five out of 90 said that their lives were impacted by reading the Bible regularly. Most respondents agreed that the Holy Spirit inspires all Scripture. Another encouraging thing is that for most respondents, Bible reading and listening to their pastors' messages help them discern right from wrong and grow spiritually. It enforces our hypothesis that Bible reading and solid biblical preaching are essential to raising biblically literate witnesses in our churches.

The Causes of Biblical Illiteracy

The primary purpose of this survey was to find out how regular churchgoers view biblical illiteracy. Though most respondents read the Bible daily and know the Scriptures well, they are concerned with the ongoing problem of biblical illiteracy.

Of 90 respondents, 68 said it was a huge concern, and 17 said it was a moderate concern. An overwhelming number of 87 have something to say about what contributes to biblical illiteracy among Christians. Interestingly, most of these respondents are regular church members and lay leaders, and a few pastors were included in this sample group.

Key Factors to Biblical Illiteracy

We shall highlight several key factors contributing to biblical illiteracy in the following groups:

Contemporary culture

- People are generally not interested in reading the Bible.
- People are busy, distracted, and bombarded by the so-called truth of the secular world.
- Over-reliance on social media and news media for knowledge.
- Broken families, negative influence of friends, and not being involved in a community.
- People search for quick answers to problems on the internet.
- Spending much time on TV and other streaming services for comfort and solace.
- One respondent summarized it well by saying people are busy and simply lazy.

Church culture

- Lack of biblical preaching and not teaching congregants to read the Bible inductively.
- Over-emphasis on topical messages rather than preaching the whole Gospel.
- Lack of discipleship and creating dependency on pastors rather than on Christ.
- People lack the patience to read the Bible or to listen to the sermons.
- Lack of awareness of the Scripture's inspiration and impact on their daily lives.
- Preachers' lives do not match their preaching.

- Megachurches and false teachers contribute to a lack of interest in reading the Bible.
- People are not taught biblical doctrines to navigate their daily lives and problems.
- A lack of welcoming culture in the churches.
- Many churches do not prioritize Bible reading; they prioritize mere church attendance.

Other Factors

- People compartmentalize their faith and do not feel the need to read the Scriptures.
- Parents do not model Bible reading to their children.
- Challenging questions and contradictions keep people from reading the Bible.
- The pull of worldly desires, lack of self-care, and apathy contribute to biblical illiteracy.
- Decline in regular church attendance due to misplaced priorities and commitments.
- Lack of relationship with Jesus, idols in the heart, and lack of self-discipline.

The following were considered as primary factors contributing to biblical illiteracy: Lack of biblical preaching, discipleship, equipping congregants to read the Bible, and implementing regular Bible study and reading of the Scriptures. These factors support the hypothesis that a lack of understanding of biblical shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching that results in biblically illiterate witnesses. The quest did not stop at knowing about biblical illiteracy but continued with a follow-up question regarding how to reduce biblical illiteracy.

Suggestions for Reducing Biblical Illiteracy

We categorized the solutions of the 79 participants to reducing biblical illiteracy into three groups.

Shepherding (Equipping the congregation with Bible reading and study tools)

- Teach people how to study the Bible inductively.

- Encourage people to read the Scriptures to encounter God.
- Develop Sunday school curriculum and Bible study programs.
- Provide a range of Bible reading plans for various age groups.
- Encourage the public reading of Scripture in church services.
- People should read the Bible daily as a spiritual nourishment rather than a discipline.

Biblical Preaching

- Preach straight from the Bible, using historical background and context when necessary.
- Teach people to ask the Holy Spirit for revelation every time they read the Bible.
- Preach the importance of reading and engaging the Scriptures in their daily lives.
- Stay in the Word. Preach expository sermons.
- Pastor preaching through a book of the Bible and a small group study goes deeper.

Small Groups/ Outreach

- Encourage studying Scriptures in small group settings.
- Return to intentional discipleship programs.
- Return to Sunday morning study times as many churches are moving away from them.
- Community outreach to encourage congregants to engage with the Scripture.
- Encourage families with small children to read the Bible together.
- Mid-week cell groups for congregants to read the Bible and pray for each other.

Summary of the Survey

The survey aimed to determine whether biblical illiteracy is a problem in the churches. Though most of the small group members surveyed seemed to have a consistent daily Bible

reading, they also agreed that biblical illiteracy is a huge problem. The 15 out of 106 represent a larger group of Christians who seldom or never read the Bible.

Various factors within the contemporary and church culture contribute to biblical illiteracy. Church attendance and people's desire to read the Bible have dropped significantly since the pandemic. However, we were encouraged by reading about multiple suggestions from the survey to help reduce biblical illiteracy. Some recommendations include pastors preaching expository sermons, discipleship, and developing small groups and outreach opportunities. The complete analysis of the results of the Survey is located in Appendix II.

The following section consists of some interviews conducted and their recommendations to determine the veracity of the hypothesis.

Interviews of Pastors and Christian Leaders

Besides the survey, several face-to-face, telephone/Zoom, and email interviews were conducted. Eighteen of 60 who received letters have responded to a personal interview. They include young and retired pastors, Christian leaders, and Bible teachers. Most are from New England, pastoring small churches. A few were involved in national-level ministries.

This interview aimed to determine the veracity of the hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. It also included their views on biblical illiteracy and how to reduce it. There were the two sets of questions asked during the interview, though not all of them were asked at each interview.

Questions on Shepherding and Biblical Preaching

1. How do you understand the role of a shepherd?

2. How does a lack of biblical understanding of a shepherd affect the church?

2. How would you describe your preaching style?

3. What is biblically based preaching?

4. Why is preaching through the books of the Bible important?

5. What are the consequences of lacking biblical preaching in churches?

Questions on Biblical Illiteracy

1. Is there biblical illiteracy in American churches, and what are the causes?

2. What is the best method of biblical preaching in the churches, and explain why?

3. What are the consequences of churches' lack of biblical preaching?

4. Any solutions to reduce biblical illiteracy?

Summary of Interviews

This section includes summaries of some interviews conducted with New England pastors and Christian leaders of national ministries.

Hunter Guthrie

Hunter Guthrie was asked two questions.

1. How do aspiring pastors these days approach shepherding?

These days, many pastors are not attempting to call themselves shepherds. Maybe teachers, but they are not considering the shepherding role of a pastor. When you see these job descriptions geared toward a CEO type, I think the churches are guilty because they desire these kinds of people to be their pastors rather than shepherds who care for the sheep. Many bought into the philosophy of mega churches, gaining people at any cost and not properly disciple them, and they will collapse one day. In my view, the mega

churches in the 90s, because of their shallow teachings, secularized an entire generation; hence, they lost them because they did not give people the counsel of God.

2. Is biblical preaching practiced in churches, and how do you preach?

The Holy Spirit has provided the things in God's Word that people need to hear and grow. The strength of expository teaching is that it allows God to set the agenda through preaching. The church I grew up in did not follow this form of preaching. A lot of sermons that were preached on Sunday mornings were geared toward self-help and practical. But that left us to become shallow Christians.
I always have room to grow and understand how to apply God's Word to my life. My shepherding, primarily, not exclusively, is done through the pulpit. I follow the tradition of preachers who value *Lectio Continua*, a Latin phrase that means continuous reading. This phrase has been used to describe the consistent approach to systematic expository preaching. I walk through the text of a passage verse by verse and explain it. I do this in most of my preaching. Now and then, I preach topical messages.[1]

Stan Carder

Stan Carder, who pastored a rural church in Montana, was asked two questions.

1. What is biblical preaching?

Biblical preaching is essential because one must preach the whole counsel of God to be obedient to the calling of God, according to 2 Timothy 4:2. It is a requirement to shepherd the flock to fulfill the concept of 1 Peter 5:1-3. It is needed to guard the flock- Acts 20:29. It is required to disciple the upcoming future pastors, as in 1 Timothy 3:2.

2. What are the effects of the lack of biblical preaching?

Failure to preach the whole counsel of God produces weak, vulnerable, and undiscerning flock which will be carried about by every wind of doctrine as written in Ephesians 4:14.

Carder had some encouragement and warnings to shepherds and for us as we progress with our thesis:

The reward of being a good shepherd is seen in 1 Timothy 4:6, but the danger to the shepherd is that failure to follow the following verses from 7-16 will lead to the decline in his spiritual health as the shepherd and the health of his flock. These are just a few thoughts that may help and encourage you as you work on your thesis. It is indeed hard work, but it does produce great rewards![2]

[1] Hunter Guthrie, Pastor of First Baptist Church Medfield, MA. In-Person interview on July 28, 2022.

[2] Stan Carder, Leading the Way Ministries. E-mail response: May 22, 2023.

Hearing about the importance of shepherding and biblical preaching from a pastor of a small rural church in Montana was reassuring. The thought that biblical preaching lends to disciple aspiring future pastors is challenging. Also, we must recognize that our spiritual health and the health of our congregation depend on how closely we follow what we preach. We must pay attention to his warning against the lack of preaching; the whole counsel of God produces a weak flock that cannot stand the wrong doctrines thrown against them.

Adam Mabry

Adam Mabry, another young New England pastor, was asked three questions:

1. How can we address biblical illiteracy in American churches?

> Coming up with a prescription for all American churches seems above my pay grade. But I can tell you what we do to address this problem in our church.
> First, we preach mostly expository sermons, teaching our people through the text. Second, we run an Establishing Foundations class, where each disciple is taught to read the Bible using an inductive Bible study method and the basics of Christian theology, practice, and spirituality. Third, we encourage everyone to develop the habit of reading the Bible independently. Fourth, we try to get people to discuss the Bible in small groups by providing a curriculum that groups must work through, which is all Bible-based.

2. What is the best method of biblical preaching?

> Regarding the best method of biblical preaching, Mabry noted, For me, I preach about 70% exegetical sermons and about 30% topical.

3. What are the consequences of lacking biblical preaching in churches?

> A lack of biblical preaching results in a lack of God's presence, His power, and disciples' malformation. When they do not have the Word of God, they will search for truth and meaning elsewhere.[3]

Aletheia Church, under the shepherding of pastor Adam Mabry, grasped the essence of biblical shepherding, preaching, and the adverse consequences when those two key aspects are

[3] Adam Mabry, Senior Pastor, Aletheia Church Cambridge, MA. Email Interview: April 12, 2023.

absent in a local church. Their discipleship model could be implemented in small churches to raise biblical literacy levels and equip congregants to become vital witnesses for Christ.

John K. Jenkins, Sr.

John K. Jenkins, Sr. is the president of *Converge*. He discussed how to address biblical illiteracy, the impact of the lack of biblical preaching, and the best method of biblical preaching.

> 1. How can we address biblical illiteracy in American churches?
>
> Through discipleship. American churches have failed to disciple people in biblical truth and principles. Discipling people will help address and assist them with becoming biblically literate.
>
> 2. What are the consequences of lacking biblical preaching in churches?
>
> A lack of biblical preaching leaves people to conclude their own truth instead of God's.
>
> 3. What is the best method of biblical preaching in the churches, and explain why?
>
> I am persuaded that expository preaching is one of the best ways to help people understand the Scriptures. While other methods are suitable, I see expository preaching as the best way to help believers grow and develop.[4]

The answers from Jenkins, with his 34 years of pastoral experience, a seventh Shepherd, as the First Baptist Church calls him, confirmed the hypothesis. The American church must recognize its discipleship failure, producing biblically illiterate witnesses. The remedy is found in discipling people through expository preaching.

Lois Adams

Lois Adams, a female pastor who pastored two churches for 16 years, discussed biblical illiteracy, the best method of preaching, and the consequences of a lack of biblical preaching in churches. It is refreshing to get a female shepherd's view on this matter,

[4] John K. Jenkins, Pastor of FBC Glenarden, Converge President. Email interview, March 14, 2023.

1. Is there biblical illiteracy in the churches in the USA, and how can we reduce it?

Francis, you know there is. We will need to encourage various methods depending on the age group, area of the country, population density, level of income, and culture. There is no one-size-fits-all, although there is only one Word, Lord, faith, and baptism. Some cultures will not listen to the Gospel if it comes from a woman. Another culture is more interested in the accuracy of the Word than the gender of the vessel. I could never have preached in the church I grew up in and was unwilling to answer the call for over a decade after moving East.

Sometimes, I feel condemned by my good, loving Christian brothers who believe in all nine fruits of the Spirit as long as I "stay in my place." So, as a woman...YES...biblical illiteracy is rampant as far as I can see...especially when it comes to women in the ministry. Many other issues exist, but I thought I would ensure this was part of your feedback. I do not see anywhere in the Scripture where God is sending women to hell for being in the ministry. There are many other behaviors, but not proclaiming and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. What is the best method of Biblical preaching?

Read, pray, study the passage; focus on finding the exegetical idea; define the subject and points that complete the thought. Ensure you have a relatable example or story and good transitions. Stick with your main topic, and don't talk too long (I do that occasionally, but only when the subject seems to demand it). Of course, having been trained at Gordon Conwell with books by Haddon Robinson, I still use his method.

3. What are the consequences of lacking biblical preaching in churches?

Division, error, we cannot even pray together because of misunderstandings. It must grieve the Holy Spirit that we dwell on erroneous differences that separate us rather than be open-minded to at least have conversations based on the Word until God reveals the truth to our hearts. We can repent and move forward together.[5]

Lee Eclov

Lee Eclov, a pastor with 40 years of shepherding experience, was asked two questions:

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?

I think the question presupposes an answer. I don't know how to evaluate biblical illiteracy across the board. My sense is that biblical illiteracy is always a problem virtually everywhere. When I was young (I was born in 1951), there was a much greater prevalence of kids attending Sunday School and families attending church.

[5] Lois Adams, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Sharon MA. E-mail Interview, October 17, 2023.

So, in that sense, I'd say there was somewhat better knowledge of the Bible. It was even greater 100 years ago. But the nation is much more secular, so it stands to reason that more people in our churches have not been raised learning the Bible.

2. How can we reduce biblical illiteracy?

In addition to regular Sunday Bible times, I suggest using study materials from BibleProject.com and Walk Thru the Bible to help increase the desire to read the bible among the congregants.[6]

Hunter Barnes

Hunter Barnes, the founder of the Daily Radio Bible, was asked two questions.

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?

Engagement with the Scriptures is a genuine concern of mine, so I am glad to hear you are researching this area. Regarding your question, I believe biblical illiteracy is a problem among Christians in the USA. I don't have any readily available data to support that claim, though I know there has been recent work in this area by others. My belief that Biblical literacy is in decline is rooted more in my experience as a Pastor for 15 years than in empirical data.

2. How can we reduce biblical illiteracy?

I believe the answer lies in a revelation of Jesus Christ and our witness to Christ. Engagement flows from the encounter. An encounter with the One, the Living Word of God, seems the best way to see people re-engaging with the Scriptures.
Getting more people to read the Bible should not be the goal. Bearing witness to the Living Word of God should be.[7]

Bruce Peterson

A small New England church pastor, Bruce Peterson, discussed biblical illiteracy.

Yes, I think it is in the culture of New England Christians. People may be attending a church for a long time, and you need to explain what the Old Testament and the New Testament are about, and it takes time. People don't grow up understanding the Bible in their church or family. You must faithfully preach the Scripture and make Scripture

[6] Lee Eclov — Pastor, author, speaker, and writer. Zoom Interview, March 31, 2022.

[7] Hunter Barnes, https://www.dailyradiobible.com/team/hunter-barnes/ E-mail Interview, March 30, 2022.

accessible by explaining the Bible's crucial and essential concepts; sometimes, as always, you must start at the beginning.[8]

Stephen Witmer

Stephen Witmer, Pepperell Christian Fellowship's pastor, was asked two questions:

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?

Yes, there is remarkable biblical illiteracy. Many churches are stopping Sunday School programs, contributing to the problem. Many Christians increasingly doubt the authority and relevance of the Bible, so why study it closely? That contributes to the problem.

2. How can we reduce biblical illiteracy?

We must see the Bible as God's Word, desirable, delightful, and worthy of our attention and submission. If we do, we'll prioritize teaching and learning and obeying it. Our church has organized years-long Bible memorization efforts, and we've been reading through the Bible together as a church for over two years. We don't just want to be a Bible-preaching church; we want to be a Bible-obeying church."[9]

Robert Sheldon

Robert Sheldon, the pastor of Easton Baptist, was asked three questions:

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?
Unfortunately, yes, a lot of people don't have a base knowledge of the Scriptures. So, biblical illiteracy exists in churches, which makes our job more challenging. Many would instead fill their minds with what is on Facebook than the Bible. If you don't read the Bible, you don't have the foundation to build your life.

2. How can we reduce biblical illiteracy?
It probably can't be solved on a Sunday morning. You must encourage people to read the Bible independently, come to Bible study, etc. In 30-minute preaching on Sunday service, you can't give all of the Bible. You have to encourage Bible reading beyond the Sunday service. We provide specific incentives to people to read through the Bible in one year or the New Testament in one year, etc.

[8] Bruce Peterson, Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church Norwood, MA. In-person Interview, July 26, 2022.

[9] Stephen Witmer, Pepperell Christian Fellowship Massachusetts. E-mail Interview, June 23, 2023.

3. What is your view on biblical preaching?
Some people have only one way of preaching style: they look at a text, dissect it, diagram it, and give out three points. I have issues with those who say biblical preaching is only one way and method. Biblical preaching could take many different forms. I like the first-person narrative sermons. Everyone loves a good story. I think the narrative form of preaching is one of the neglected forms of biblical preaching these days. All forms of biblical preaching are expository preaching, including narrative preaching.[10]

Michael Fierrini

Michael Fierrini, a pastor for 25 years, discussed biblical illiteracy in his church.

I struggle with biblical illiteracy in our church. Certain members who have been attending the church for over 17 years know the high points of the Bible, like David and Goliath's story and Christmas narrative. But if I were to talk about Balaam, Korah's rebellion, and Cain's sin from the book of Jude, more than half of the church would have no idea who those characters are or where to find them in the Bible.

I don't think most people have systematic Scripture reading time. I think people are prayerful, but I am unsure how biblical their prayers are. It is not that they can't read the bible but don't want to read it. People are all over the place, either politically or ideologically. People read the scriptures but don't understand, engage, and live by them, which would lead to transformation.[11]

Stanley Schultz

Stanley Schultz expressed his view on biblical illiteracy, its causes, and its remedy.

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?
Pastors are swimming against the current of biblical illiteracy.

2. What are the causes of biblical illiteracy?
It is due to people watching a lot of TV. They are on social media and the internet. They are not reading books, and their attention span is declining.

3. How do we reduce biblical illiteracy?
It would help if you worked hard at your preaching, so people don't tune out, yet you don't want to dump things on people. One thing I need to safeguard my heart from getting excited about is the Bible and what I preach. It doesn't become stale. You need to be excited that you are seeing stuff in your Bible. Then we can say to the congregation, do

[10] Robert Sheldon, Easton Baptist Church in MA. Zoom interview, July 20, 2022.

[11] Michael Ferrinni, Calvary Community Church Dorchester, MA. In-person interview, July 14, 2022.

you see! It is cool! If that makes one person crack open the Bible more, it did something in that person.[12]

Louis Zinnanti

Louis Zinnanti, an Assembly of God pastor, was asked three questions:

1. Is there biblical illiteracy?
After serving for 32 years in Philadelphia, Canada, Miami, Boston, and Sharon, I have seen biblical illiteracy in churches growing over the last 15 years.

2. How do we reduce biblical illiteracy?
At Victory Assembly, we have established our discipleship system around a three-track core curriculum to address biblical illiteracy. They deal with questions such as: What is a disciple? Why do I need church, and What should I do for God? These core classes are designed to give a person a strong foundation in God. Track 2 is designed to help people apply God's Word to their lives.

After attending the Track 1 and 2 courses, people can sign up for Track 3, our Know Your Bible Classes. There are two, Old Testament and New Testament, and they take about nine months to go through together. These classes give an in-depth look at each book of the Bible and take students through a specific reading plan that will provide them with a solid understanding of the Bible narrative and redemptive history.

3. What is the best method of biblical preaching?
The best method of biblical preaching is any method that conveys God's Word to the church family in a manner that is understandable and applicable to their lives and situations. I use several forms depending on my goal, if I am in a sermon series, or if I want to convey just one big idea. I think biblical teaching lays the foundation of church culture and biblical integrity for a church.

I don't think it matters who brings the Word as long as they are a solid expositor and decent communicator. We allow young people and lay members enrolled in our School of Ministry to preach during the Summer months so that we can mentor these young communicators in their homiletical abilities.

This gives the congregation a chance to see what God is doing in the lives of those who are being developed, and it provides the leading teaching pastors a rest.
When we return to the pulpit in September, the congregation is ready to hear us speak again. Our voices don't ever become dull to our sheep because there is variety.[13]

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[12] Stanley Schultz, Faith Baptist Church, Stoughton, MA. In-person interview, July 7, 2023.

[13] Louis Zinnanti, Lead Pastor Victory Assembly of God, Sharon MA. E-mail interview, September 5, 2023.

We agree that we must rely on the Holy Spirit more than getting bogged down with methods of preaching. Also, from our experience in YWAM, equipping young people with how to preach is the best way to raise the next level of biblical preachers. So far, only shepherds of various backgrounds shared their concerns about biblical illiteracy and how to reduce it.

Don Sunukjian

Don Sunukjian, a seminary professor, was passionate about God's Word and presenting it accurately and relevant. Sunukjian was asked the following questions.

> 1. Why are you convinced to preach through the books of the Bible?
> The preacher is more inclined to cover larger sections and the totality of Scripture. The listeners get a complete picture of the unfolding content of a particular author/book. God revealed the Scripture in 'books,' so we should approach our preaching by focusing on books.
>
> 2. What impact does it have on your congregation?
> It's hard for me to discern whether the impact was due to 'preaching through books' or a week-in-week-out biblical message' each Sunday.
>
> 3. What challenges did you and the congregation face with this approach to preaching?
> For me, it was how long to stay within a biblical book. Should I cover larger sections or hit highlights? Should I go through several chapters, take leave for some months, and then pick up again where I stopped? For the congregation, if they missed several Sundays, they had some gaps in their grasp of the more prominent themes of the book.
>
> 4. Are there any counterarguments to this type of preaching?
> None that I am aware of, as long as the above concerns are handled well. Plus, between book series, there's usually a break of several weeks when topical, seasonal, or one-shot messages occur.
>
> 5. Are there any books you suggest against this approach?
> No, the "whole counsel of God" should be preached. However, some books can be more daunting, e.g., Hebrews, Revelation, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.[14]

[14] Donald R. Sunukjian, Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. E-mail interview, January 25, 2023.

Pat Tiller

Pat Tiller, a former elder of Hope Church, was asked the following questions:

1. What causes biblical illiteracy?
There are several causes for biblical illiteracy, each of which might require different remedies. People have no confidence in their ability to read and understand the Bible. Here are a few causes: 1) They are taught to read the Bible in verses without considering the broader context. 2) Preachers and teachers often try to impress their listeners with their knowledge (however incomplete) of Greek, Hebrew, and Jewish backgrounds, history, etc. 3) People are conditioned to interpret the text through the lens of some popular teacher or favorite pastor. 4) People often believe that understanding the Bible comes mostly from direct inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

2. What is the best method of biblical preaching in the churches?
I don't know if there is a single "best" method. Different methods would have various advantages and might be appropriate for different situations. Preaching through Numbers might look different than preaching through Proverbs or Paul's letters. There would be occasions where topical preaching might be suitable as well. However, I might advise preachers to keep these principles in mind while preaching biblically:

- Preach through books. Give each book its integrity. Different books say different things, have different emphases, and have different approaches to the same topic.
- Point out how context helps control interpretation.
- Make sermons an example of interpretation that the congregation can hope to follow.
- Warn your hearers of common misinterpretations.
- Talk about the role of the Holy Spirit in softening our hearts to make us willing and eager to hear from God and appropriate the text's message to our lives.

3. What are the consequences of lacking biblical preaching churches?
The most apparent consequence among American evangelicals is the failure to obey the call to follow Jesus, rejecting the world. We prefer that God somehow blesses our world and is compatible with God's call to take up our cross and follow Him. James warns us that friendship with the world is enmity towards God. John warns us not to love the world or the things in the world. Yet, we believe that devotion to God and country are the same. We believe that if we follow Jesus, He will bless us by granting us health, material goods, and comfort. We believe that "blessed are the wealthy, for God has entrusted them with wealth." We believe that the great commandment is to know the correct doctrine and to persuade others to agree with us. In other words, the lack of biblical preaching makes many pastors into false prophets who (like the false prophets of Israel) use their preaching to preserve the social and political status quo.[15]

[15] Dr. Patrick Tiller, ThD. Personal correspondence, March 20, 2023.

We agree with Tiller's assessment of various causes contributing to biblical illiteracy and his warning to pastors to remain faithful in preaching God's Word. Pat Tiller was passionate about pastors preaching the whole counsel of God to their flock.

When we became a pastor seven years ago at HCS, Tiller led a men's small group Bible study, teaching them from the book of Jeremiah for two years using the inductive Bible study method. We as pastors must pay close attention to biblical preaching lest we become false prophets who use their preaching to preserve the socio and political status quo. We need more elders in our churches who can hold pastors to such accountability.

The following section summarizes the overall findings from the survey, personal interviews, and information gathered through empirical data.

Conclusion

This research project was designed to determine the hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. This design included a survey, personal interviews with pastors and Christian leaders, and an examination of the empirical data. Our quest led us to survey 106 people, primarily regular church members of various denominations.

We also interviewed in person, over Zoom, and emailed 20 pastors of small churches in New England and a few Christian leaders with national-level ministries. We investigated the empirical data available through research organizations and searched various web articles. All these efforts confirmed our hypothesis that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. The quest of this thesis

pressed forward to find out the causes of this biblical illiteracy and how we might reduce it among our congregations.

Finding out the potential causes and possible solutions to reducing them was the more exciting part of the process. The irony is that we have too many Bibles, Bible reading methods, and teaching tools, yet many do not read the Bible. That is a genuine concern in the USA. On the other hand, most people worldwide do not have access to a Bible in their language.

Biblical illiteracy in our churches is partly due to the failure of biblical shepherding. As a result, our congregations have many malnourished and ill-equipped sheep. As the shepherds of Israel were accountable to God for not caring for their sheep (Ezk 34), so were we for ours. Our research hypothesizes that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. The basis for our assumption was our 20 years of ministry experience with YWAM, 16 years of pastoring two small churches in the New England region, and what we have heard at the pastor's gatherings.

After exploring the empirical data, our survey results of 106 Christians and sitting down with 20 of our fellow shepherds for personal interviews made us realize that the hypothesis was not an assumption but an undeniable reality. This research gives us enough grounds to believe that a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses.

We all might agree that this is indeed an undeniable challenge. But if we had only stopped there, we would have only satisfied our curiosity and not contributed much to address the biblical illiteracy that is making so many ineffective in their witness. We were recently confronted with that reality in our congregation. We invited two potential baptism candidates for a luncheon with ten other seasoned Christians. Over the discussion, one member enthusiastically

explained how many baptized people responded to Peter's message and several other incredible accounts of God from the book of Acts. A 60-year-old woman coming from a Catholic church, who happens to be one of the candidates for baptism, excitedly said she wanted to read that book and asked where she could buy it. We chuckled at her question and told her it was in the Bible, next to the Gospels. That made us realize how many others, like this lady, in our congregations are ignorant of basic biblical knowledge.

Undoubtedly, biblical illiteracy is a real problem, more than we realize. We presented the causes of biblical illiteracy in this chapter's survey and interview section. Interestingly, some reasons for this problem are the decline in church attendance and a lack of desire for God's Word. Should this surprise us? No! Amos—a regular shepherd, and a tree caretaker—predicted it long ago.

> The time is surely coming, says the Sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from border to border, searching for the Word of the Lord, but they will not find it. Beautiful girls and strong young men will grow faint in that day, thirsting for the Lord's Word. (Am 8:11-13)

This famine of God's Word is affecting individual Christians and societies. The trends of declining church attendance, and lack of Bible reading and engagement of Scriptures also indicate that we live in the last days, as Timothy predicted. "In the last days, there will be difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money…love pleasure rather than God." (2 Tim 3:1-5)

Over the years, both as a missionary with YWAM and now as a pastor of 16 years, we have seen many genuine Christians drift away from their faith. We would attribute it to their lack of Bible reading, understanding, and application. One of the questions in the survey was, how do we address biblical illiteracy? We received several solutions from the survey and the interviews

regarding reducing it and producing biblically literate witnesses. We have summarized them in three broad categories:

1. Shepherding (Equipping the congregation with Bible reading and study tools)
2. Biblical preaching
3. Small groups/Outreach

As a lifetime student of the Bible, we cannot overemphasize the importance of reading, studying, and applying the Bible for practical Christian living.

The next and final chapter will discuss the outcomes by substantiating our hypothesis and providing suggestions based on the data analysis. We will also share what we learned from the study and what we do at HCS in these three areas: shepherding, preaching, and witnessing. We will share about the limitations of this study and conclude with further recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter will substantiate our hypothesis based on the data analysis and provide suggestions. We will also share what we have learned from the study and what I do at HCS in these three areas: shepherding, preaching, and witnessing. We will share about the limitations of this study and conclude with further recommendations.

Results of the Hypothesis

The findings of the data collected affirm our hypothesis that a lack of Biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. The motivation for our thesis came from a deep desire to understand biblical shepherding and preaching to become a caring shepherd of God's flock at HCS.
Bobby Ross Junior, in his article, expresses the struggle of one particular denomination called the Church of Christ.

> The number of full-time preachers in Maine is alarmingly small, said Charlie Harrison, minister of the 25-member Brunswick Church of Christ in Maine. "The rest either have a part-time preacher or no preacher at all." New England, which includes Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont is a domestic mission field with 6,000 Church of Christ members out of 14 million.
>
> According to Park Linscomb, one of New England's longest-tenured ministers, roughly half the region's 108 congregations lack a full-time pulpit worker. More than three-fourths of the congregations reported an average Sunday attendance of less than 100. Many can't even find a part-time preacher, said Linscomb, who has served the Manchester church, a 180-member congregation in New Hampshire's largest city, since 1974.[1]

[1] https://christianchronicle.org/new-england-churches-struggle-to-fill-pulpits/ (Accessed January 13, 2024).

This article further supports our hypothesis. Many churches in New England are small and facing similar challenges. The two small churches we have pastored have remained around 40-50 members. We believe that many pastors are faithfully shepherding their small congregations. Yet many shepherds either leave or may not become shepherds of small churches by pursuing bigger and better-paid congregations elsewhere. As a result, God's flock is uncared for and unprotected like the "West Keene Church of Christ in southwestern New Hampshire."[2]

As a small church pastor, we soon discovered our congregation's shallow biblical knowledge. This led us to understand whether this lack of knowledge of Scriptures was only pertinent to our church or a more significant problem plaguing the churches in the USA. The articles we read, the empirical data we looked at, the survey we conducted, and the personal e-mail interviews we have had with church members, local pastors, and Christian leaders all point to the ongoing and troubling problem of biblical illiteracy in our churches.

What is causing the biblical illiteracy and producing biblically illiterate witnesses in our churches? To address this question, we assumed a lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, resulting in biblically illiterate witnesses. Our research gave us adequate grounds to believe that this supposition is one of the main reasons.

Charles Kettering, an inventor, holder of 186 patents, and head of GM's research from 1920 to 1947, said, "A well-defined problem is half-solved."[3] A lack of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, which produces biblically illiterate witnesses, which is no longer a supposition but a severe problem that must be addressed creatively. If a lack

[2] https://christianchronicle.org/new-england-churches-struggle-to-fill-pulpits/ (Accessed January 13, 2024).

[3] https://jesusgilhernandez.com/2022/12/21/problem-well-defined-problem-half-solved/#:~:text=Charles%20Kettering%2C%20an%20inventor%2C%20holder,us%20to%20understand%20the%20problem (Accessed January 13, 2024).

of biblical understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching that produces biblically illiterate witnesses, how do we handle it?

That led us on a quest to understand shepherding and preaching from a biblical perspective and see how they both were interconnected in shepherding small churches. Our findings from the survey reinforced the assumption that biblical illiteracy is a huge problem in our churches. We were encouraged by reading the ongoing works of two seasoned Christian leaders burdened by biblical illiteracy and what they did and are encouraging others to do to reduce it. This is how Michael Youssef articulated the issue of biblical illiteracy.

> The Bible is truly a life-changing Book because its Author is a life-changing God. Throughout history, people have either loved or hated the Word of God or hated it. People have either believed it or rejected it. They have tried to change it, they have tried to edit out the parts that offended them, and they have tried to water down its message. Year after year, the Bible is the bestselling book in the world—yet most Bibles end up on a shelf, gathering dust. According to the American Bible Society and the Barna group, just 18 percent of American adults spend any time reading the Bible. This means that 82 percent of adults allow their Bibles to sit unopened and unused, making the Bible the least-read bestseller of all time. This is one of the chief reasons for our culture's moral and spiritual decline. After more than half a century of walking with the Lord, I can confidently say that the Bible is the only spiritual food that will nourish your soul. Daily reading of the Word of God is the only power for living. It is the only mirror that will reveal the truth about the real you. And it's the only washing and cleansing agent that can truly purify you.[4]

We could not agree more with Youssef. If the whole focus of this thesis is only to prove biblical literacy is a problem, it would not benefit the shepherds except to make them feel miserable. The quest of this thesis-project pressed forward to find out the causes of this biblical illiteracy and how we might reduce it among our congregations and Christians in general. Finding potential solutions to reducing it was a more exciting part of the process. The irony is

[4] Youssef, Michael. *How to Read the Bible (As if Your Life Depends on it*). (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2023), pp. 5-6.

that we have too many Bibles, Bible reading, and teaching tools, yet many do not read the Bible. That is indeed a mind-boggling reality.

On the other hand, most people worldwide do not have access to a Bible in their language. While some work hard to reduce biblical illiteracy in our country, others fight to eradicate biblical poverty worldwide. Loren Cunningham, the late founder of YWAM, announced his vision to address Bible poverty worldwide:

> Loren shared that of the roughly 8,000 languages in the world, only 730 have a total Bible. This is after 2,000 years of effort. He said it took 1,500 years to get 40-50 translations and then one generation to double that. But we're still far short at less than one-tenth of the total." I dream that every person on Earth will have access to a Bible in their mother tongue.
>
> He shared they need the Old Testament (laws and principles) to benefit and transform their nations as it once did the Western World. They also need the New Testament to find grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Loren has pursued this vision of every language having a Bible through a project called "End Bible Poverty Now" for several years.[5]

Youssef and Cunningham remind us of our responsibility as shepherds to shepherd our congregations well. Part of it is to help our congregants read and understand God's Word as if their whole life depends on it and be committed to preaching the whole counsel of God.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on Psalm 23 made us realize that we are sheep and shepherds at the same time. We learned a few principles to help us remain a good sheep of God's flock. First, a good sheep craves green pastures. As the Scripture describes, we were once like sheep gone astray. We are grateful for the Good Shepherd who graciously gathered us into His flock. When we think of

[5] https://www.usrenewal.org/loren-cunningham-shares-gods-dream/ (Accessed January 13, 2024)

what the psalmist said in Psalm 23:3, “He lets me rest in green meadows,” we see this vivid picture of sheep in luscious green meadows, fully satisfied and rested under a tree.

We first saw this in the Netherlands, walking through the green grass fields called polders, where these furry creatures enjoy green pastures. We wished we were like those sheep well-rested in green pastures in a world filled with fear and anxiety. Our Good Shepherd knows where His sheep can find wholesome green pastures that are His whole counsel, which is His Word. Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (Jn 6:35)

As good sheep, we must crave spiritual food to nurture my soul, remain healthy, and stay closer to God. That can only come by daily reading and meditating on God’s Word and applying it to our everyday living. Then we are truly blessed as the psalmist noted, “Oh the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or stand around with sinners or join in with mockers. But they delight in the Law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.” (Ps 1:1-2)

Second, a good sheep follows the shepherd closely. By nature, sheep are prone to wander, and we have the same propensity. Prophet Isaiah highlighted that tendency when he said, “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own.” (Is 53:6) As sheep, we need to stay closer to the Good Shepherd, listening to His voice through reading, meditating on Scriptures, and worshiping Him. Otherwise, we can be distracted and wander away from following the Good Shepherd. When we follow the Good Shepherd closely, as it says in Psalm 23:3, “He guides me along right paths bringing honor to his name.” What brings more honor to God is not the quantity but the quality. It is not the numerical growth but His flock's spiritual and emotional growth.

Haddon Robinson has this to say regarding following the Good Shepherd. “Like sheep, we go astray, wandering our own unguided way. Yet, throughout the centuries, millions have testified that in the middle of such uncertainty, they have received guidance from God.” David tells us that God, his shepherd, “leads (us) in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake”[6]. The Hebrew states, “He leads me in the right paths.”[7] As a good sheep, we crave wholesome spiritual food and follow the Good Shepherd. As a shepherd, our leading people to the Good Shepherd depends on how closely we follow Him as a sheep. This thesis helped us understand and practice the biblical role of a shepherd.

How to Raise Biblically Literate Witnesses

As a shepherd, we do the following things to raise biblically literate witnesses at HCS: Biblical preaching, small group Bible times (Discipleship), local and global missions.

Biblical Preaching

We feed wholesome spiritual food to the flock through biblical preaching. Over the years of pastoring, we firmly believe in sharing with the members what they need to hear from God’s Word rather than what they want to hear. To do that, we bring the whole council of God by preaching through the books of the Bible. We have preached through Luke, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and are working through Ephesians. Occasionally, we preach topical messages as well.

[6] New King James Version.

[7] Robinson, Haddon W. *Trusting the Shepherd. (*Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery Publishers, 1968), p.57.

Our sermons are biblical, as they follow the principles of Exegesis. We do not combine many Scriptures to make them sound biblical. We use other Scriptures to support the passage of Scripture we would preach on any given Sunday. During the week, we send "Shepherd's Reflections," the main takeaways from Sunday's sermon, to engage the flock further.

Small Group Bible Times (Discipleship)

While answering the question, how do you tackle biblical illiteracy among Christians?, participant 51 suggested, "Churches need to bring back Sunday School and have a weekly engagement of study either in life groups or weekly Bible study to get them turning the pages."[8] HCS's Mission statement is, "Glorifying God by becoming devoted followers of Christ. One of the ways we accomplish that goal is through an ongoing discipleship program called *Small Group Bible Times*. Each Sunday, we divide the members into age and gender-appropriate small groups to study the Bible for an hour. We follow the inductive Bible study method to teach our members how to read and interpret the Bible correctly.

The inductive Bible study method observes a passage of Scripture and then draws conclusions based on those observations. This discipleship process helps our members become devoted followers of Christ. We also offer other spiritual growth workshops on various topics regularly. Moreover, we encourage and provide the congregants with different Bible reading plans. Public reading of Scripture is a regular part of our Sunday worship service.

[8] Taken from the Survey, Biblical Literacy and Scripture Engagement in Churches, Q22 Answer 51, Appendix II.

Local and Global Missions

Besides preaching biblically based sermons and implementing ongoing discipleship programs, our shepherding involves giving vision to our members for Evangelism. We encourage our members to get involved in local and global missions. Locally, we organize community outreaches, run a food pantry, and minister to the sick and infirm in our church. We network with other churches to take care of the needs of the homeless in a neighboring town.

Twenty percent of our annual budget supports eight missionaries and ministries in the 10/40 window area. We livestream our Sunday service, which has blessed Christians in India and a few other countries. Our intercession team helps our members stretch their prayers, from merely praying for our members' needs to taking on various global crises as they arise.

Shepherding HCS through biblical preaching has been a learning process. Seeing how various congregation members grow spiritually and become biblically literate and effective witnesses for God in our church and community is satisfying. It is not that we have arrived at doing the right way at HCS; there is much we can learn from other shepherds in the region.

Suggestions for the Shepherds

Based on our learning, we want to leave the following suggestions to our fellow shepherds.

1. Be a Lifelong Learner

As shepherds with all good intentions to bring the whole counsel of God to our congregants, we spend a lot of time reading and understanding God's word, which is the right thing to do, and we must continue in that discipline. Also, let us be lifelong learners by reading

spiritual books written by other God's servants of the past and current years. We highly recommend the following books that helped us in our ministry.

a. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality,* by Peter Scazzero. This book helped us balance our emotional and spiritual health.
b. *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* by Timothy S. Laniak. Forty daily reflections that helped us understand our three-part role as a shepherd: Provider, Protector, and Guide.
c. *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals,* by John Piper. This book has 35 chapters to help seasoned and aspiring pastors avoid professionalism in ministry and cultivate the passionate and compassionate heart of a shepherd. These are just a few resources to help us along the way.

2. Find a Spiritual Mentor

Finding a seasoned pastor as a mentor is immensely helpful. Over the years, we sought after several mentors to help us in our walk with the Lord. We meet with three retired pastors regularly to seek their counsel. We believe they keep us balanced in our ministry.

3. Seek Fellowship with Other Pastors

We entered pastoral ministry due to the call of God on our life with a rosy picture of what that would look like. After three years into our first pastorate, we wanted to quit due to very challenging situations, but we did not. During the pandemic, being part of a pastor's support group called *John 17:23*, run by Barnabas Ministries, was a lifesaver. We highly encourage you to check out a *John 17:23*[9] pastor's support group in your area and seek to be a part of it, which will help you from burnout and running away from your pastoral ministry.

4. Don't Give Up! Your Reward is Waiting

[9] https://john1723.net/about-us/ (Accessed January 13, 2024).

As a young boy, our grandparents pastored a church and three of their sons were also in pastoral ministry. That was an inspiration to become a pastor. Our call to be a pastor became clearer and affirmed by several Christian leaders and pastors. Being a shepherd of God's flock is a noble calling, and one must take it seriously and remain faithful to that calling. We may sometimes be tempted to run away from that high calling due to challenging situations. But if we do not give up and care for the flock God has entrusted to us, when the Great Shepherd appears, we will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. (2 P 5:2-4) Lee Eclov, a veteran shepherd, has some words of encouragement,

> Underneath all the external things a pastor may be called to do, he needs to have a sense that I am here to take care of God's flock; all the other things, in an orderly way, should contribute to the primary task of caring for the flock. The pastor's role is to care for the flock and not to grow the church. Be shepherds of the flock that is entrusted to you.[10]

We must recognize that we are just under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes, we are tempted to claim that the church is ours, though God may have enabled some to start it from the beginning. We must never lose sight that the church, locally and globally, belongs to God everywhere. The Apostle Paul reminds us whose church we are called to serve and to take care of, "So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock his church, purchased with his own blood over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders." (Act 20:28)

Our Limitations

The time constraints, pastoral responsibilities, and financial resources made us face certain limitations. Our finances have been affected, limiting the survey to a one-time study and a

[10] Interview with Pastor Lee Eclov, August 31, 2022.

group of 120 people from small churches in New England. We could have done a few more surveys and targeted churches from other regions to have a bigger pool of data to work with.

Being a full-time pastor caused some time constraints, splitting our time between studying for weekly sermon preaching, books for the project, and research. Not to mention other pastoral responsibilities in the church and the community. In addition to that, we allotted time for my family, marriage, and physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Getting responses to our e-mails from participants for the survey and personal interviews was challenging. People, especially pastors, have been busy with their own flocks and had hardly any time left for other activities, such as giving interviews for a thesis-project. Hence, we only secured 18 interviews from various practitioners, which we greatly value. Despite these limitations, we gathered enough data to support our hypothesis. In hindsight, more could have been done. Perhaps someone else could take it further from where we had left off.

Further Recommendations

We realize that our work is not exhaustive and conclusive. More can be added and improved. We present some recommendations for further and deeper research on this subject.

1. The current thesis-project has focused on churches within the New England region. In the future, research could be taken further to the other areas of the country and beyond to even observe some international trends in biblical illiteracy, shepherding, and biblical preaching and how churches in different cultures and countries might deal with similar issues in their settings.

2. Our primary focus has been smaller churches. Further research could go deeper to discover how biblical illiteracy, shepherding, and biblical preaching affect megachurches.
3. We have stressed that preaching through the books of the Bible is better in the long run. It would further strengthen this supposition if further investigation is conducted regarding the various other preaching methods, such as topical, verse-by-verse, issue-based preaching, etc., and their impact.
4. The geographical scope of the survey could be expanded by sending it to a bigger pool of Christians and pastors beyond the New England region, including more women pastors.
5. A study of a few megachurches in the region could be conducted to learn about their proven methods of shepherding and biblical preaching to many congregants in their churches.
6. Encourage other aspiring pastors to pursue biblical shepherding and preaching to equip biblically literate witnesses for His glory. We pray that our Chief Shepherd gives us the strength to care for, feed, protect, and lead God's flock for His glory.

   > Now may the God of peace who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen. (Heb 13:20-21)

How Do We Shepherd Online Church (Flock) Through Biblical Preaching?

This research and thesis-project were geared toward and limited to shepherding small churches in the New England area through biblical preaching. However, we might also consider the correlation between shepherding and biblical preaching in other cultures or countries. For

example, is biblical illiteracy a prominent issue in different countries that have embraced Christianity? If so, what contributing factors lead to biblical illiteracy and its relation to biblical preaching in their respective cultures?

God's flock gathers in a typical Church building on a Sunday service. COVID-19 has taught us that the church, in a traditional sense, has changed or is rapidly changing. More people, particularly the Millennials and Generation Z,[11] are moving further away from a structured and organized religion. They are very active on social platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, where they spend hours. If Jesus was to look at them, he would say compassionately, “They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matt 9:36-38). He would have the shepherds go after those lost sheep and bring them into God's flock. (Jn 16:10) Appendix III sheds more light on this topic.

Exploring effective ways to engage and disciple these vast numbers of young people is a challenging and worthy task. We cannot ignore these immense numbers of harassed and lost young people without a shepherd. Let us pray that God will equip and send shepherds to this vast harvest field. May we remain faithful to our shepherd's call and actively shepherd God's flock, whether they meet in churches or graze virtually, and join our livestream services.

Conclusion

This thesis-project began with a very strong need to understand how to shepherd a small New England church effectively. The journey started with a hypothesis that a lack of biblical

[11] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ (Accessed February 22, 2024).

understanding of shepherding leads to a lack of biblical preaching, which produces biblically illiterate witnesses in our churches and communities.

In this process, the empirical data, survey results, various books and articles, and personal interviews with pastors and Christian leaders helped the author of this thesis-project immensely. He was able to understand multiple causes of biblical illiteracy and how to minimize it by shepherding small churches through biblical preaching. The researcher is grateful to his fellow shepherds of small churches in New England for sharing their wisdom and experience in shepherding. Our sincere prayer is that whoever reads this thesis-project will glean some principles and helpful tools to become passionate, reflective practitioners as they endeavor to feed and care for God's flock in their churches.

Words of Encouragement

Dr. Tim Laniak, author of *While Shepherds Watch Their Flock* (now *The Good Shepherd* by ODBP) and *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (IVP), has graciously written some words of encouragement that we want to share to end this thesis-project.

> Let me add my words of encouragement to the spiritual shepherds in New England, a place where many of you are raising small flocks while praying for big revivals. You have my profound admiration for the daily work of tending to their needs, whatever they may be. It is not thankless work, although the most important words of affirmation may come only after this life is over.

A Letter to the Shepherds from Lee Eclov

Dear fellow pastor,

God, for reasons known only to Him, plucked us out of the line of his upward-bound saints and gifted us to His church as pastors and teachers. When He called us, He also embedded

in our spiritual DNA a capacity and duty to teach and preach the Scriptures, to bring out its treasures, old and new.

In his thesis, *Shepherding Small Churches Through Biblical Preaching*, our brother Francis championed expository preaching, an approach to preaching I've embraced for over 40 years. However, I've learned that biblical preaching requires more than careful handling of the text. As challenging as that is, there's more to preaching than that.

To begin with, we must love the people to whom we preach. It's easy to love the Bible; entirely true and reliable, rich and fascinating, and life-giving. Our people are not always so inviting! But preaching without love comes off as a pair of cymbals dropped on the floor. We pray, not necessarily to overcome lovelessness (for we may delight in our flock), but to find the touch points of a text for those sheep entrusted to us. A loving sermon becomes wise, warm, and grace-filled when it is prayed for.

No sermon is reliable that hasn't been shaped through ongoing conversation with the Lord. It isn't sufficient to simply ask God's blessing before we begin. Through prayer, we ask the most critical questions of the text and of ourselves. Through prayer, we open our own hearts to the Word lest we only lecture instead of preaching.

Often, I would imagine the Spirit quietly sitting across my desk as I worked on a sermon. Sometimes, when I was puzzled about meaning or implications, I'd look across to Him for an explanation. Sometimes, I had the sense that He'd just smile and wait, forcing me to continue thinking. Other times, He seemed to pose a provocative, revealing question that would move me forward. Occasionally, I could almost hear a voice saying, "Have you thought about it this way?" And there were times when the Spirit helped me see how my own heart could conform to God's wisdom or will.

There are preachers who regard exposition as a flood of exegetical facts about the text. But remember, a sermon is not an informational speech. (Remember speech class in high school?) A sermon is a *persuasive speech*. Our God-given task is to persuade people to think or act differently, in accordance with Scripture, through the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. Stories and vivid language help them. Not every fact we discover about a text, as fascinating as it might be to us, contributes to persuasion. Too much information distracts our listeners. They begin to think that "deep preaching" is telling them all manner of things about a text they didn't know. But deep preaching is what penetrates the heart in grace, love, and power, producing more thoughtful and obedient disciples of Jesus.

One more thing: never let a small congregation diminish your commitment to excellent preaching. Study hard and wisely. Do your own work before you read commentaries. That way, instead of sitting in a lecture with the authors, you can converse with them.

Pray at every step, not only to rightly divide the Word of truth but also to kindle your love for the flock and your love for Jesus, who gave you this holy work.

Be ye glad!

Pastor Lee Eclov[12]

[12] Pastor Lee Eclov retired in 2020 after over 40 years serving three Evangelical Free churches. Today, he befriends pastors, preaches often, and writes a weekly column for PreachingToday.com. He is the author of five articles and five books and was an adjunct professor of pastoral counseling at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for 20 years. Email received February 19, 2024.

APPENDIX I

NEW ENGLAND RESEARCH PROJECT

RESEARCH IDENTIFIES EIGHT COMMON TRAITS OF NEW ENGLANDERS

Eight common traits of people living in New England have been identified by the New England Research Project, an extensive joint effort of Vision New England and the Ockenga Institute at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary over nearly a year.

"Sometimes we think of these distinctive traits as unique to New Englanders. That is not true of all of them – but when combined, they make up an accurate composite of New Englanders today," says Rev. Steve Macchia, president of Vision New England. "For example, New Englanders resist change, but that is true of others in our country. The difference is why people in New England resist change, and that's what we have been trying to unpackage."

One of the motivating factors for the research was the high burnout rate among graduates of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary when they took pastorates in New England.

"We were determined to discover why seminary graduates entering the ministry in New England seemed to burn out so much more quickly than in other regions of the country," says Dr. Garth Rosell, Professor of Church History and Director of the Ockenga Institute at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Vision New England, committed to building healthy churches in every community in New England, was concerned that its training programs, including the seminars of its church Leadership Services, reflect the unique needs of pastors and ministry leaders in New England. Its Outreach Ministries also needed a better understanding of what makes New Englanders the people they are.

"Effective ministry and evangelism in any cultural situation depends heavily on a clear understanding of the social character of the people of the region," says the Rev. Steve Macchia, president of Vision New England. "This basic missionary principle is the foundational reason for this project."

The research team surveyed pertinent literature in various fields, surveyed empirical data already available in libraries and on the Internet, and interviewed key people. Assumptions were then placed before the whole team and discussed – and further research was assigned. Finally, the research team traveled to Boston, Connecticut, a suburban Massachusetts community, and New Hampshire for meetings with pastors and church leaders to test the assumptions against their experience in their churches and communities.

Eight Common Traits Confirmed

The research and meetings with pastors in key churches confirmed the following eight common traits:

1. New Englanders Tend to Resist change

The research uncovered that fewer people in New England changed their religion than in any other region of the United States, with only 21.2% in New England changing their religion between 1971 and 1994, versus 35.7% for all of the U.S. While local government approaches have changed nationwide, town meetings remain the governing force in 88% of New England

municipalities. In rural New England, 71% of rural residents want to continue to live in their community, with 62% in the suburbs and 47% in cities not wanting to move.

Corporate structures in New England are significantly less flexible than in other parts of the country – especially compared to Silicon Valley. Finally, fewer people in New England say they have had a "born again" experience – 16.5% versus 36.5% for the nation.

2. New Englanders Tend to Value Tradition

Historical associations get much more attention in New England. More New Englanders have officially joined a church or synagogue – 83.8% compared to 68% nationwide. New Englanders tend to think that "science makes our way of life change too fast" (64.6% compared to 58.9% for the nation). More New Englanders were educated in parochial or other religious schools – 33.9% compared to 18.6% for the U.S. That may partially explain why our divorce rate is also the lowest in the nation (11.4% versus 13.3%).

3. New Englanders Tend to be Roman Catholic

While only 27.3% of the nation is Roman Catholic, 59.3% of New Englanders are Roman Catholic. That does not mean that all are loyal Roman Catholics, for only 43.3% of the total population in the Boston Archdiocese are actually registered Catholics.

4. New Englanders Tend to Have a Secular Mindset

Boston ranks lowest in "Bible and Devotional Reading" of all 211 metropolitan areas in the U.S. Boston's index of 38 is 62% below the national average. Church attendance is also the lowest of any region, standing at 27% compared to 41% nationally. New Englanders give less to their religion, rely less on the Bible to make decisions, and more people expect that "science will solve social problems like crime and mental illness" (35% compared to 23.1% nationally). Boston is also the nation's primary market for "alternative music."

5. New Englanders tend to be Self-Reliant

A larger percentage of New Englanders work – 52% versus 47.6% as a nation. As a result, fewer percentages receive federal family aid – 4.7% versus 5.0% nationally. And New England has the highest percentage of college-educated people and the highest number with graduate degrees. As a result, only 76.3% admit to praying once a week or more, compared to 82.3% nationally.

6. New Englanders tend to be reserved

Most agree with the statement that they are more reserved – 68% agreed, and 27% disagreed. Most also agree that New Englanders are "less friendly." Not surprisingly, few Christians in New England evangelize others – only 25.0% in New England have encouraged others to receive Christ, versus 46.5% in the United States.

7. New Englanders Tend to Favor Insiders

Insiders often dominate the town meeting. The three northern states have the least racial minority population of all 50 states, while the three on the southern tier are in the bottom half of states when ranked by percent of racial minorities. As a result, New England played a leading

role in the movement to restrict immigration to the U.S. New Englanders also trust local government more than they do state or federal government.
Finally, New England corporations reflect inside preference, with closely held information and control, emphasis on company loyalty, and hierarchical corporate structures.

8. New Englanders Tend to Operate Locally

Local control is very important to New Englanders, and despite much criticism, the town meeting survives. A local veto often thwarts Walmart, fast-food restaurants, and even sports arenas. In corporations along Boston's Route 128, there is less sharing of information and greater aversion to risk-taking, especially compared to other high-tech regions. Finally, New Englanders have greater trust that their local governments will spend their tax dollars wisely compared to state or federal governments.

The New England Research Project team, continues to solicit input on what distinguishes people in New England, recognizing that even as we generalize about the region, there are distinct differences north of the Massachusetts border from the three states south of it.

APPENDIX II

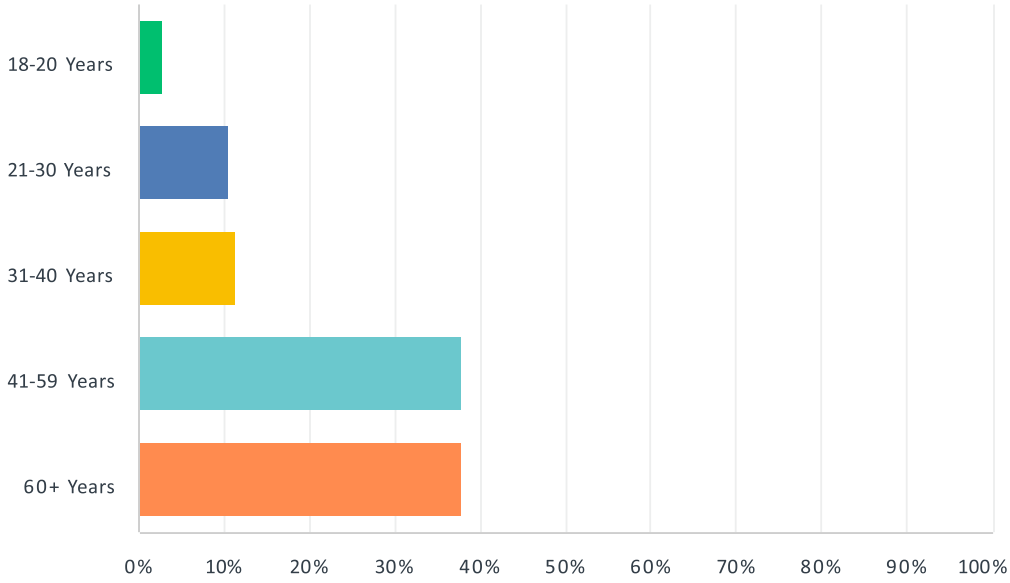
BIBLICAL LITERACY AND SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

IN CHURCHES

SURVEY RESULTS

Q1 Tell me about yourself

Answered: 106 Skipped: 0

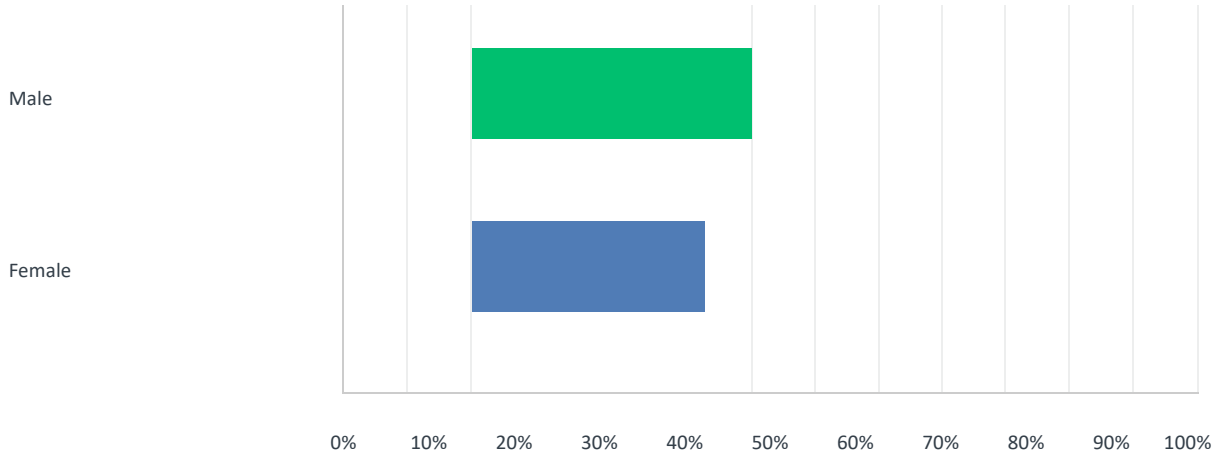


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-20 Years	2.83%	3
21-30 Years	10.38%	11
31-40 Years	11.32%	12
41-59 Years	37.74%	40
60+ Years	37.74%	40
TOTAL		106

Q2 Sex

Answered: 106

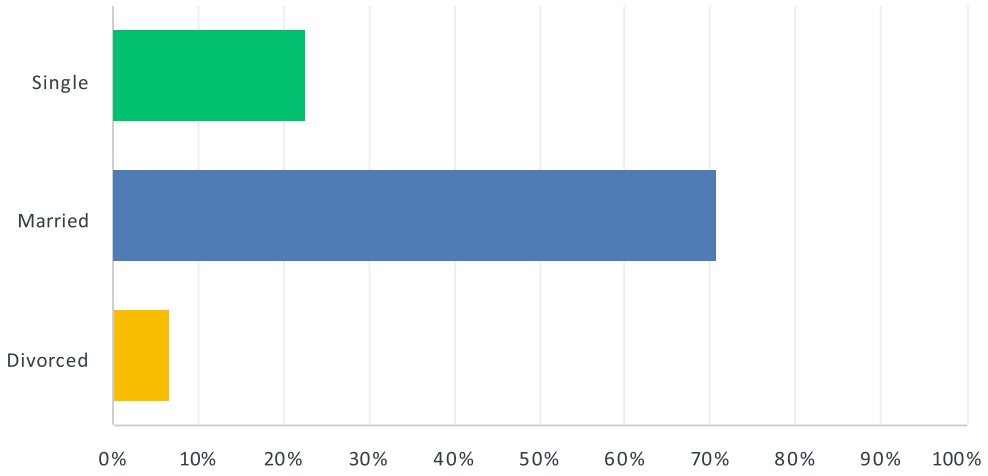
Answered: 106 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	52.83%	56
Female	47.17%	50
TOTAL		106

Q3 Marital Status

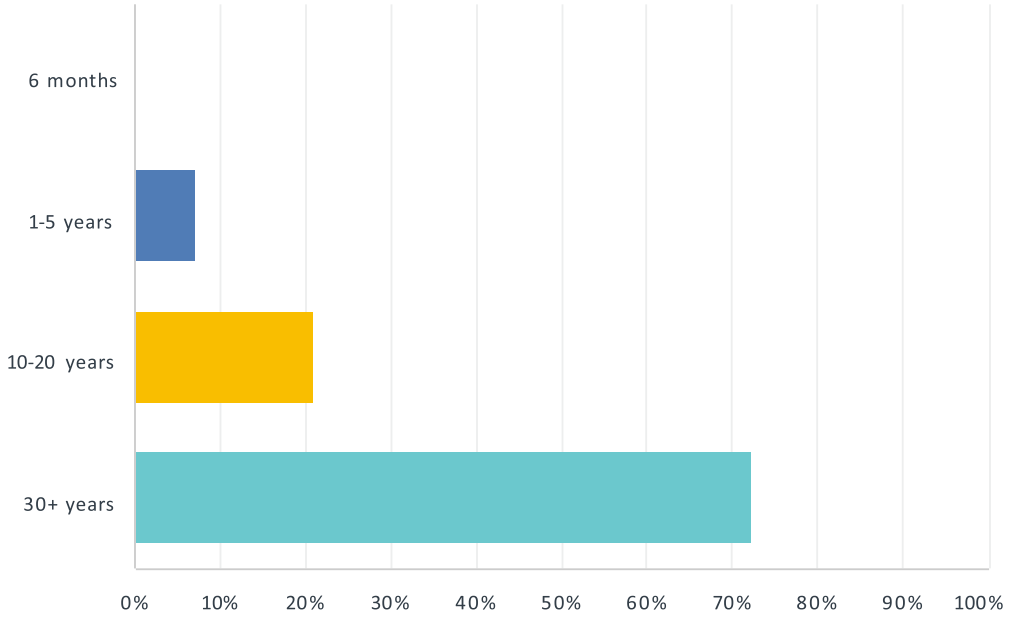
Answered: 106 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single	22.64%	24
Married	70.75%	75
Divorced	6.60%	7
TOTAL		106

Q4 How long have you been a Christian?

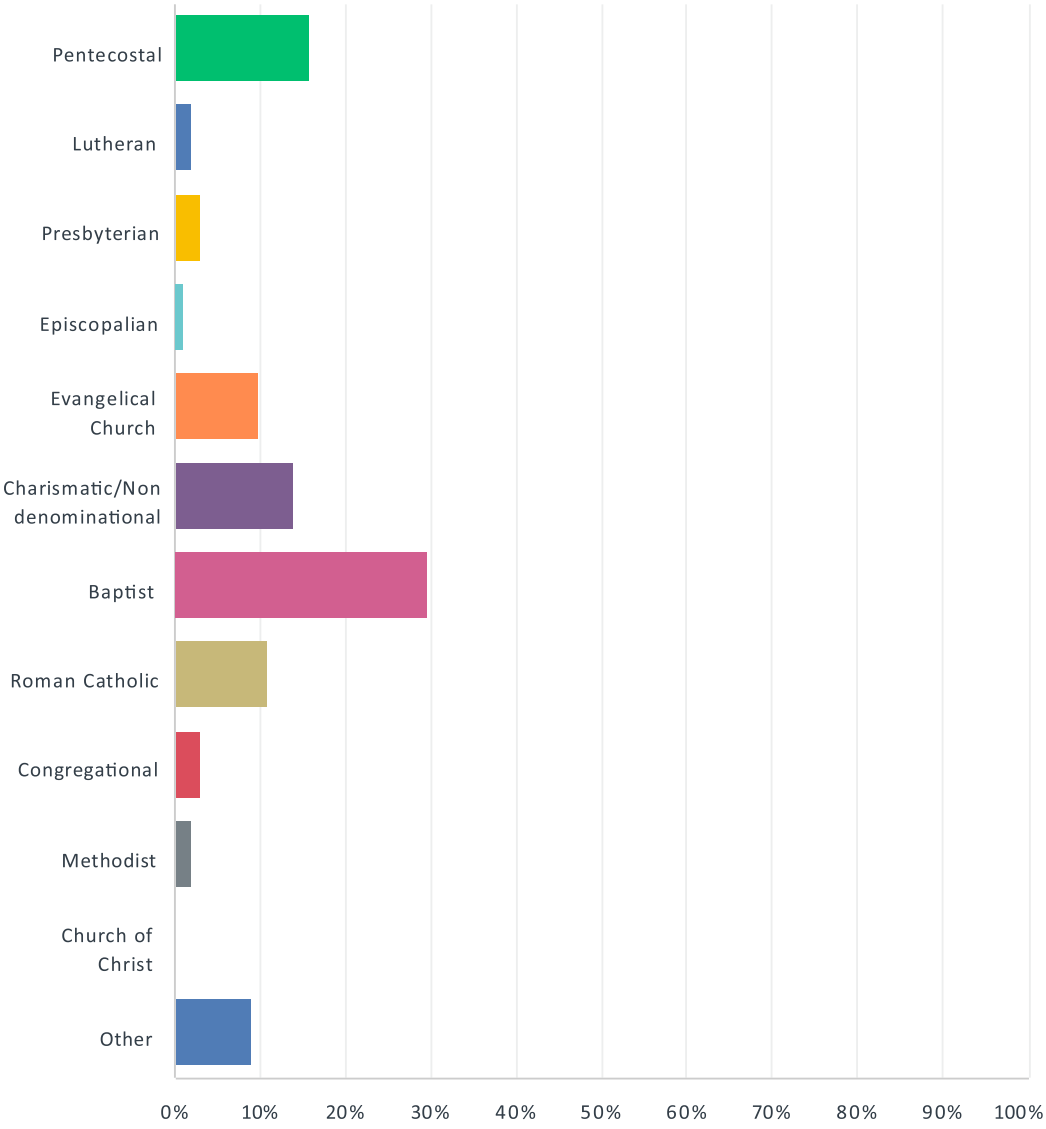
Answered: 101 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
6 months	0.00%	0
1-5 years	6.93%	7
10-20 years	20.79%	21
30+ years	72.28%	73
TOTAL		101

Q5 What is your denominational background?

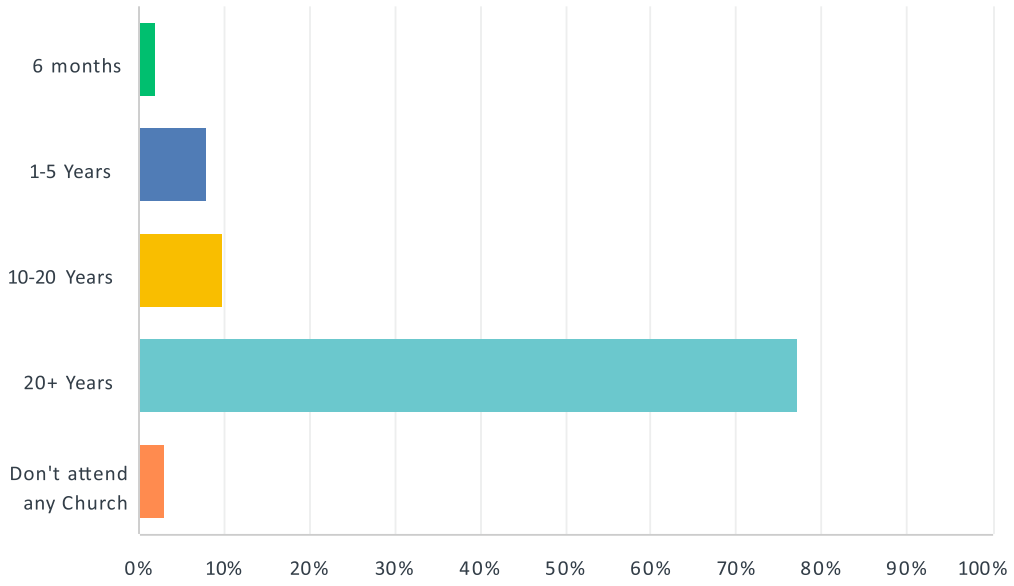
Answered: 101 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Pentecostal	15.84%	16
Lutheran	1.98%	2
Presbyterian	2.97%	3
Episcopalian	0.99%	1
Evangelical Church	9.90%	10
Charismatic/Non-denominational	13.86%	14
Baptist	29.70%	30
Roman Catholic	10.89%	11
Congregational	2.97%	3
Methodist	1.98%	2
Church of Christ	0.00%	0
Other	8.91%	9
TOTAL		101

Q6 How long have you been attending a church?

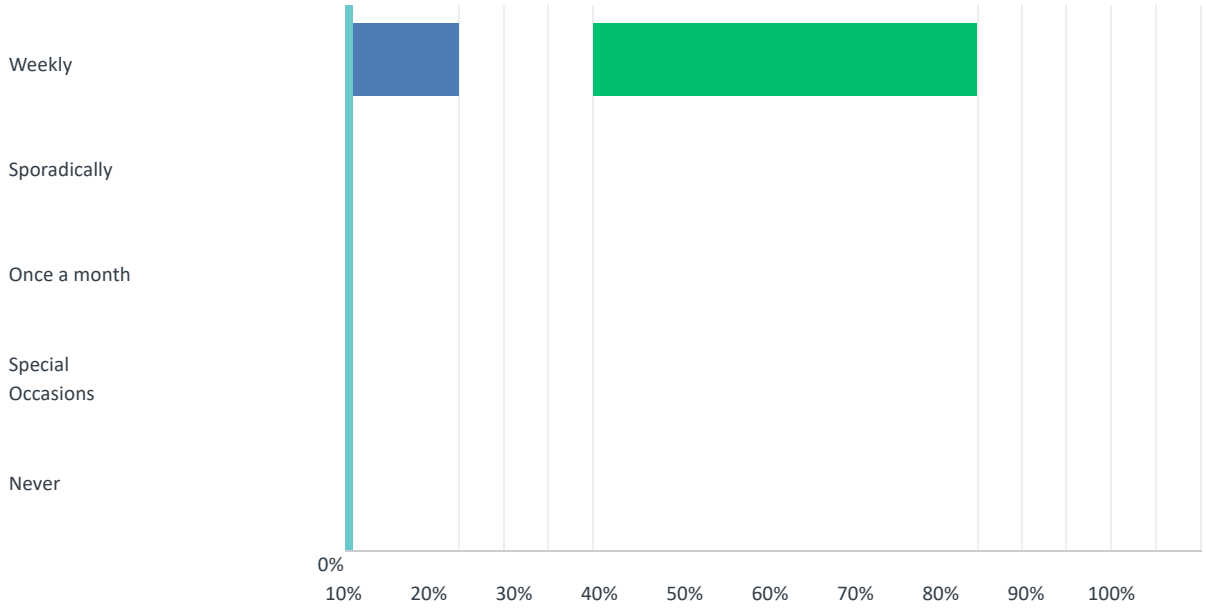
Answered: 101 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
6 months	1.98%	2
1-5 Years	7.92%	8
10-20 Years	9.90%	10
20+ Years	77.23%	78
Don't attend any church	2.97%	3
TOTAL		101

Q7 How frequently do you attend a church?

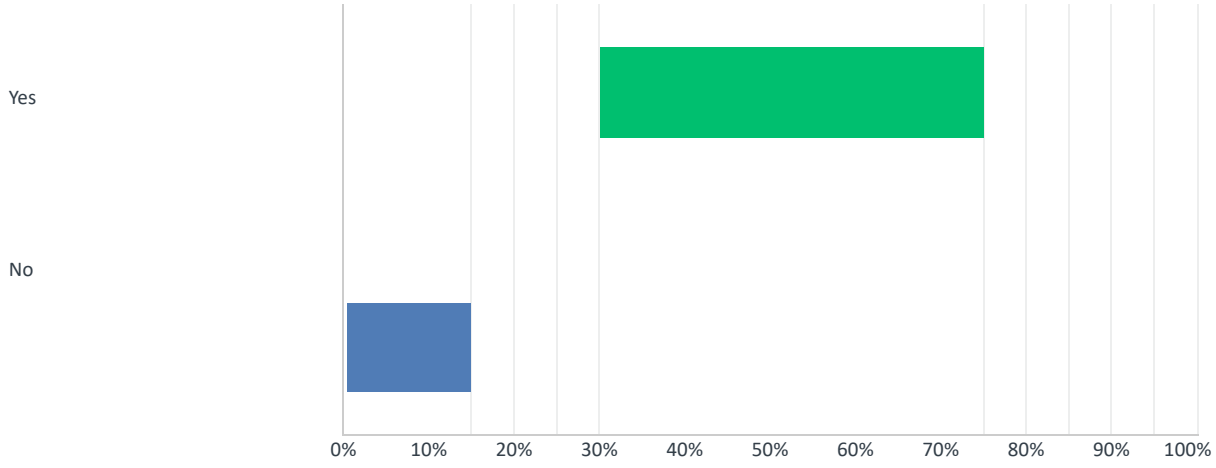
Answered: 101 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Weekly	85.15%	86
Sporadically	12.87%	13
Once a month	0.99%	1
Special Occasions	0.99%	1
Never	0.00%	0
TOTAL		101

Q8 Is there an ongoing discipleship program at your church?

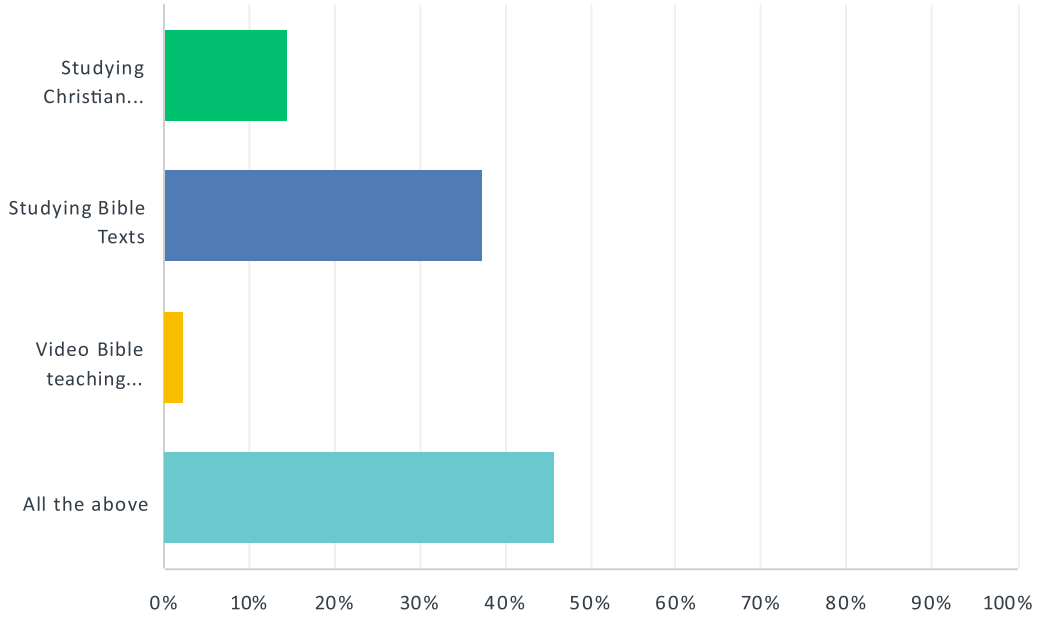
Answered: 100 Skipped: 6



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	85.00%	85
No	15.00%	15
TOTAL		100

Q9 If yes, what is the nature of the discipleship program?

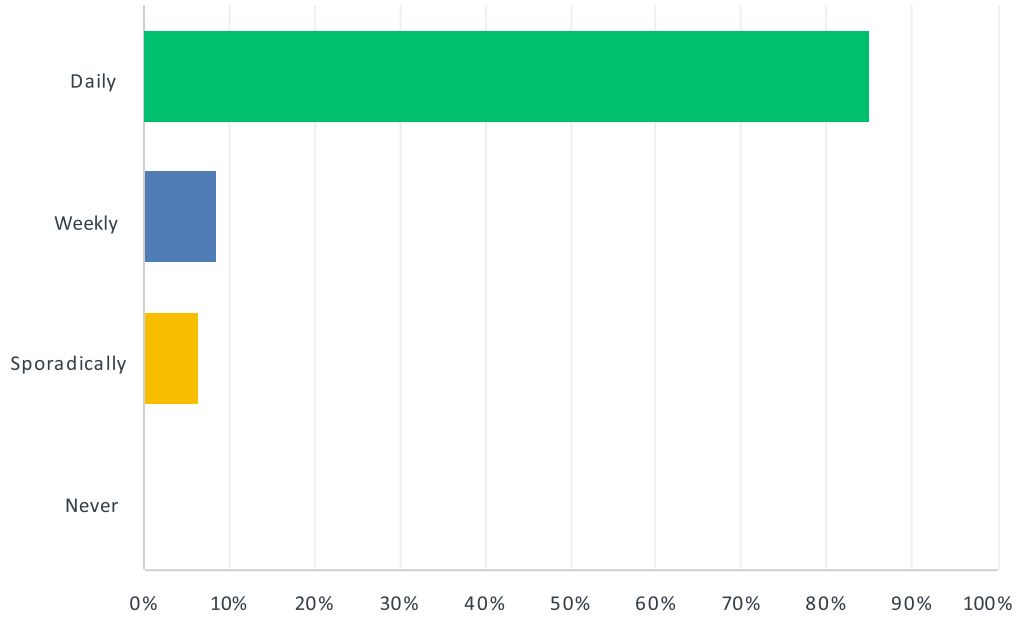
Answered: 83 Skipped: 23



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Studying Christian discipleship books by various authors	14.46%	12
Studying Bible Texts	37.35%	31
Video Bible teaching materials	2.41%	2
All the above	45.78%	38
TOTAL		83

Q10 How often do you read the Bible or listen to an audio Bible?

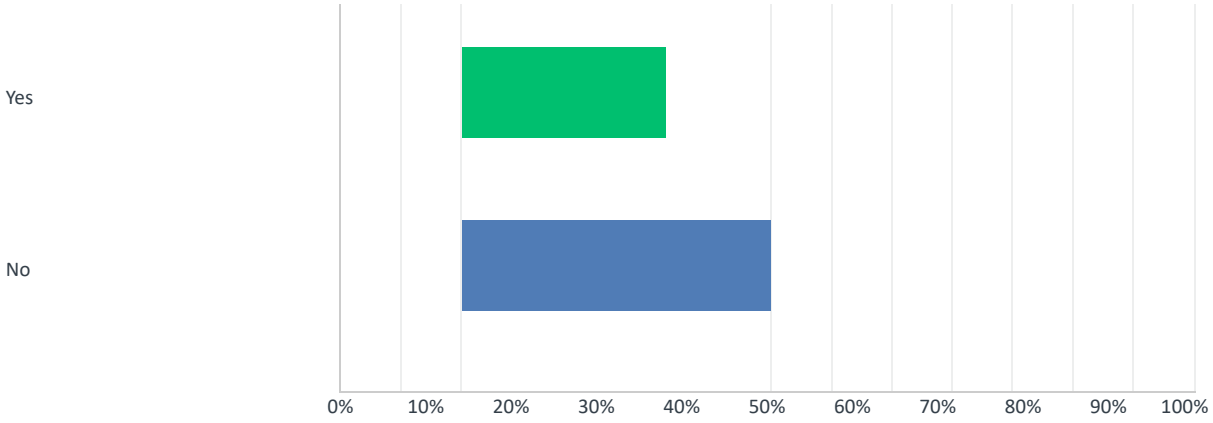
Answered: 94 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Daily	85.11%	80
Weekly	8.51%	8
Sporadically	6.38%	6
Never	0.00%	0
TOTAL		94

Q11 Do you follow a Bible reading plan?

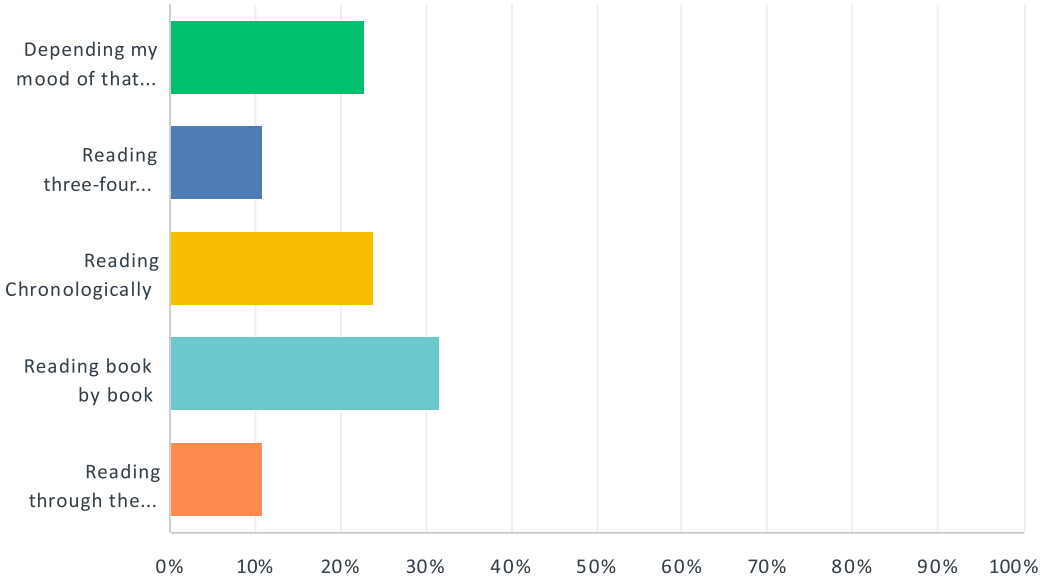
Answered: 94 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	43.62%	41
No	56.38%	53
TOTAL		94

Q12 What has been the pattern of reading your Bible?

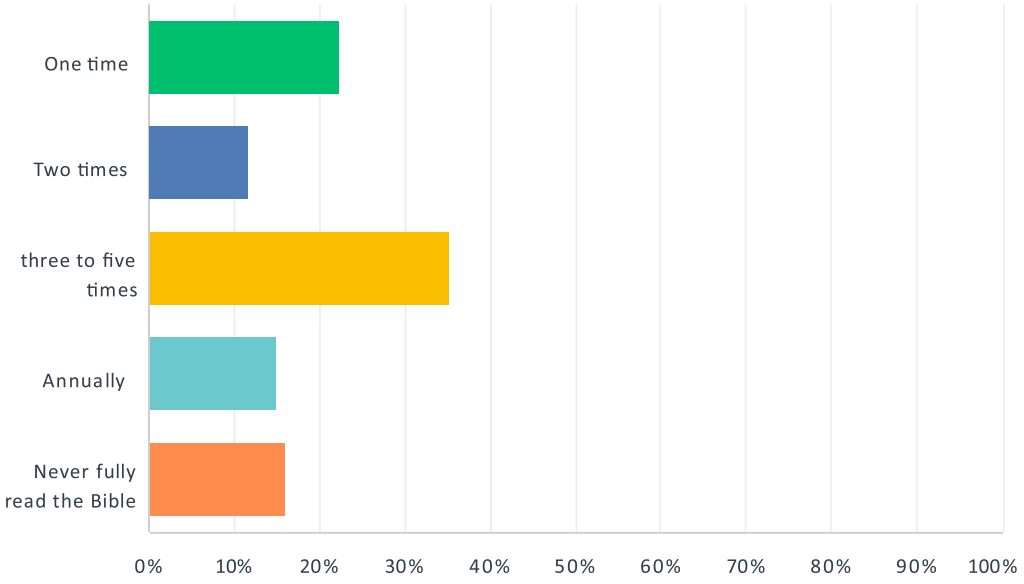
Answered: 92 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Depending my mood of that day	22.83%	21
Reading three-four chapters a day	10.87%	10
Reading Chronologically	23.91%	22
Reading book by book	31.52%	29
Reading through the Genre's of the Bible (e.g Epistles, The Law, History, etc)	10.87%	10
TOTAL		92

Q13 How many times have you read through the whole Bible?

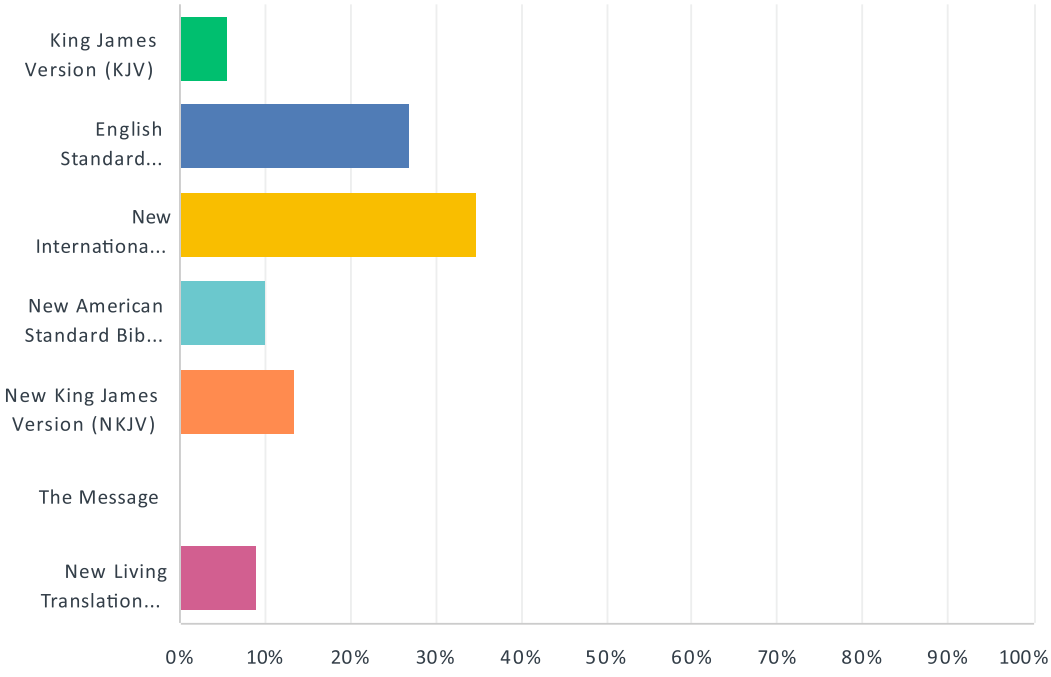
Answered: 94 Skipped: 12



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
One time	22.34%	21
Two times	11.70%	11
three to five times	35.11%	33
Annually	14.89%	14
Never fully read the Bible	15.96%	15
TOTAL		94

Q14 What version of the Bible do you read?

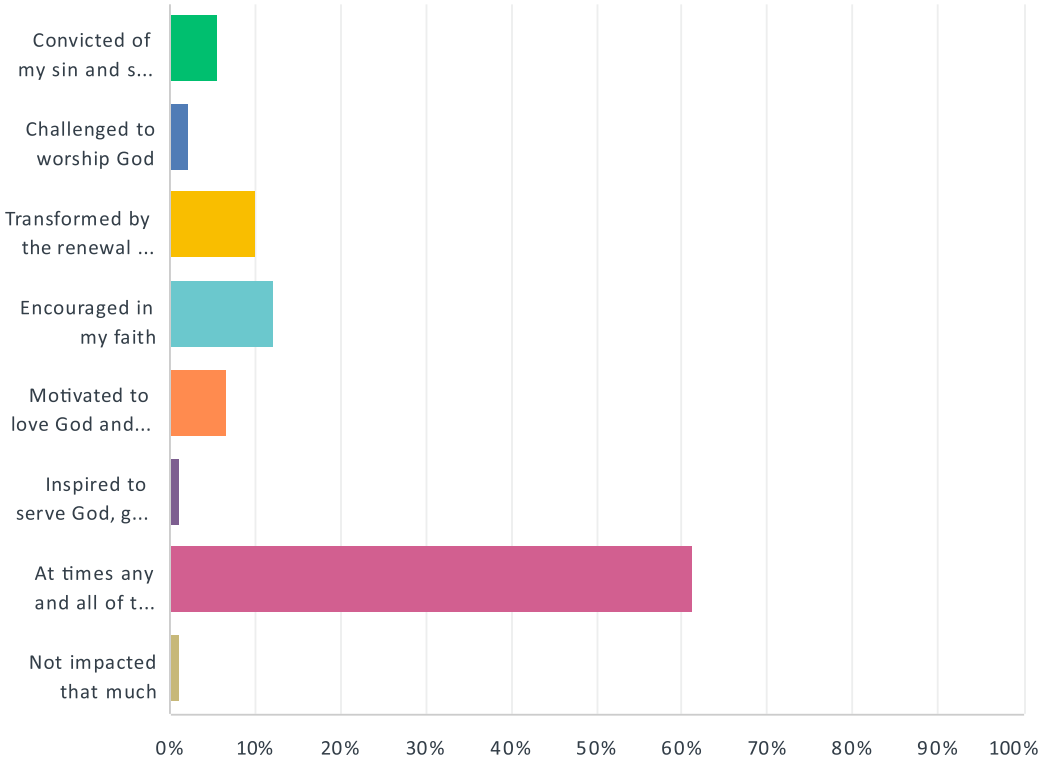
Answered: 89 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
King James Version (KJV)	5.62%	5
English Standard Version (ESV)	26.97%	24
New International Version (NIV)	34.83%	31
New American Standard Bible (NASB)	10.11%	9
New King James Version (NKJV)	13.48%	12
The Message	0.00%	0
New Living Translation (NLT)	8.99%	8
TOTAL		89

Q15 When I read the Bible, I am:

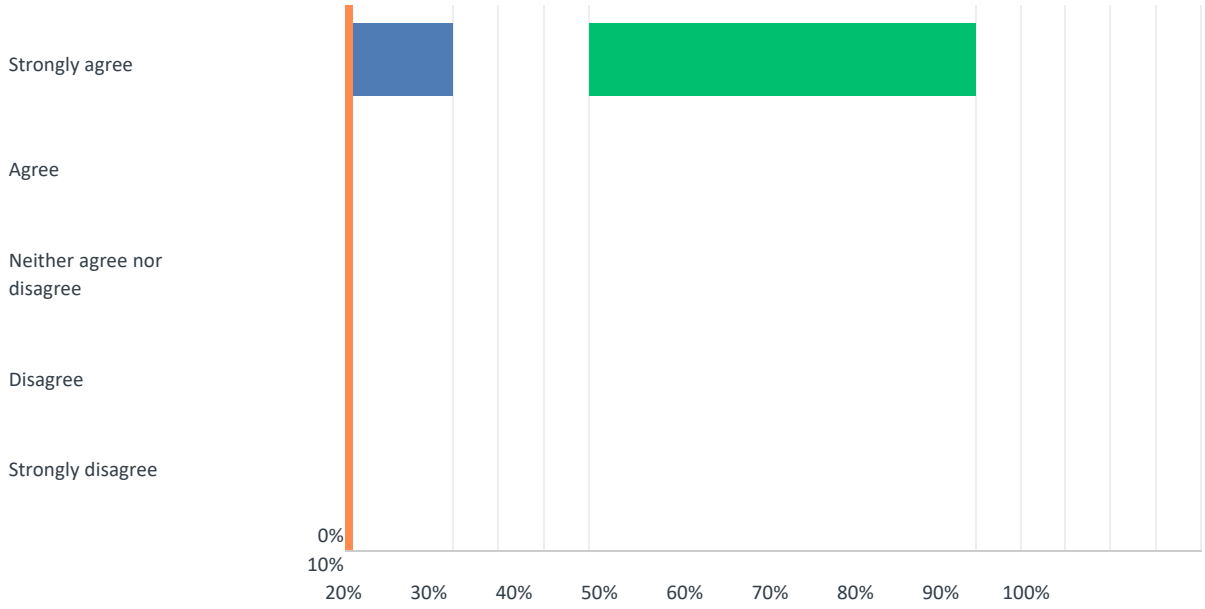
Answered: 90 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Convicted of my sin and seek God's forgiveness	5.56%	5
Challenged to worship God	2.22%	2
Transformed by the renewal of my mind	10.00%	9
Encouraged in my faith	12.22%	11
Motivated to love God and love my neighbor	6.67%	6
Inspired to serve God, get involved in social justice and missions	1.11%	1
At times any and all of the above	61.11%	55
Not impacted that much	1.11%	1
TOTAL		90

Q16 All Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit:

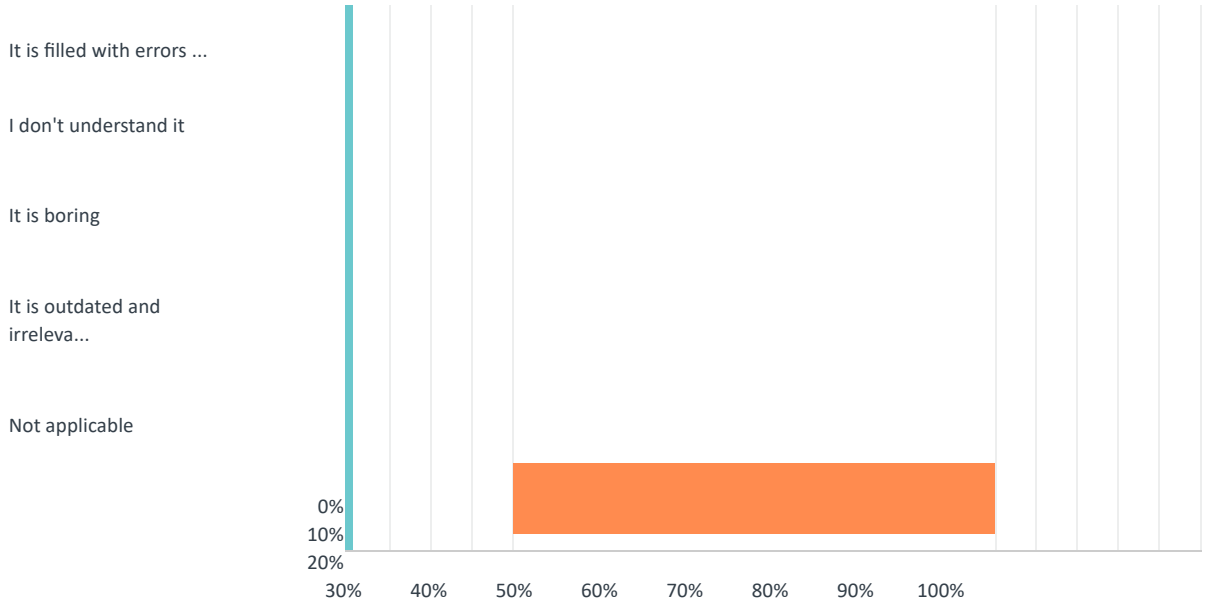
Answered: 90 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	85.56%	77
Agree	12.22%	11
Neither agree nor disagree	1.11%	1
Disagree	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	1.11%	1
TOTAL		90

Q17 I don't read the Bible because:

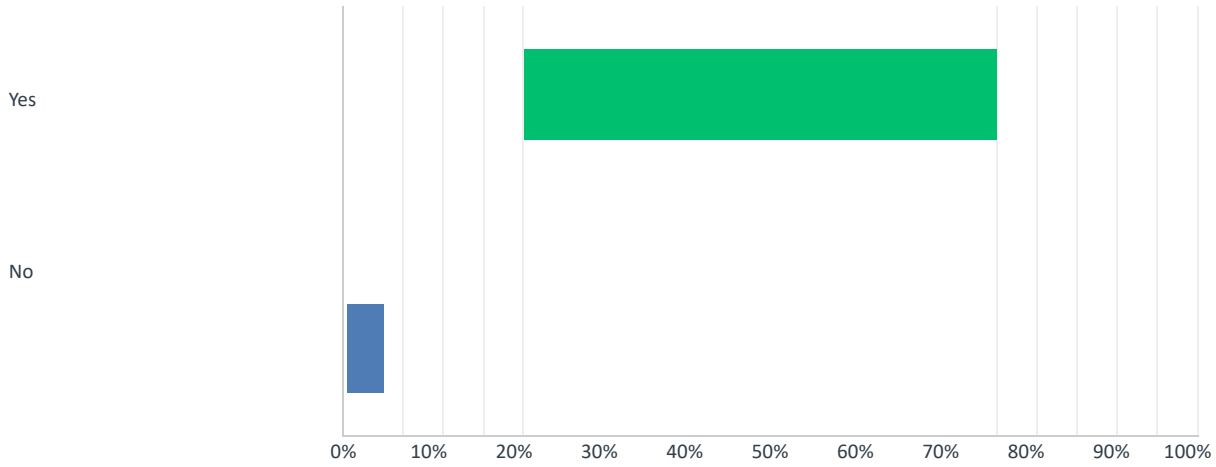
Answered: 87 Skipped: 19



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It is filled with errors and contradictions	0.00%	0
I don't understand it	1.15%	1
It is boring	1.15%	1
It is outdated and irrelevant to modern times	1.15%	1
Not applicable	96.55%	84
TOTAL		87

Q18 I am able to discern truth from error because of my knowledge of Scripture

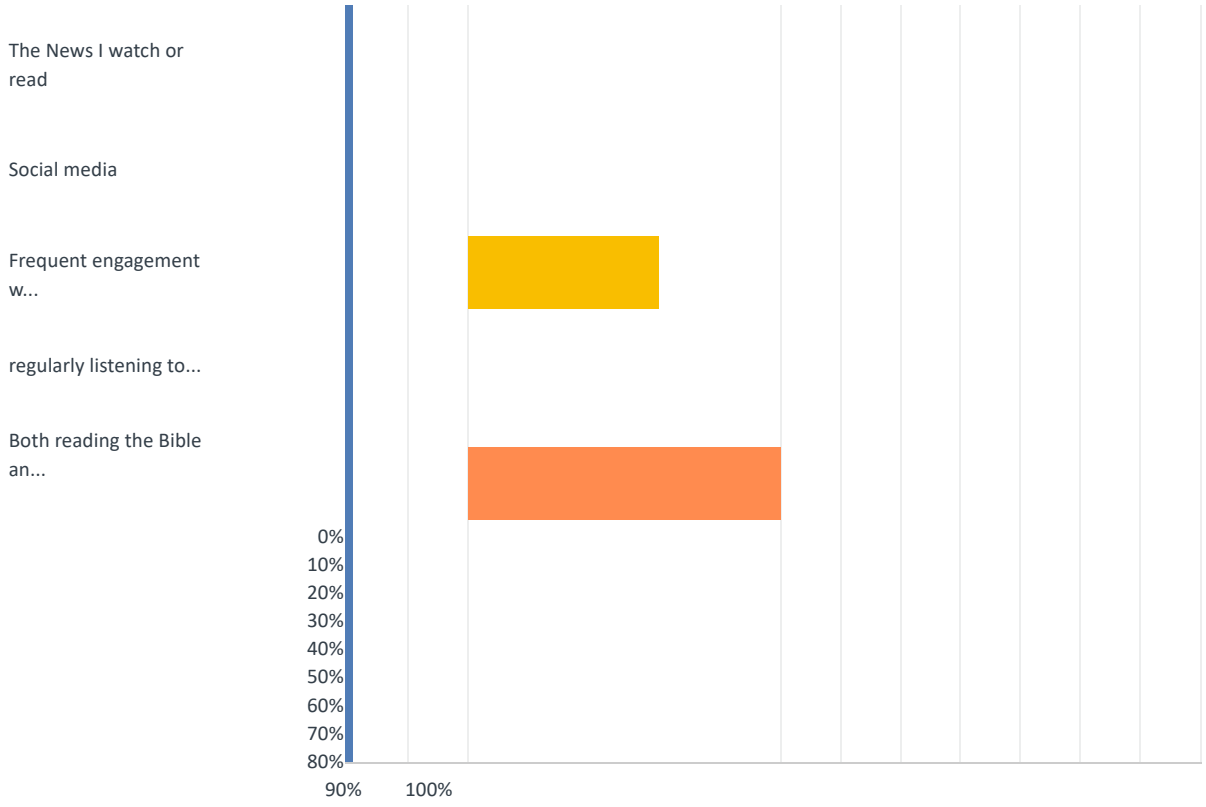
Answered: 89 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	95.51%	85
No	4.49%	4
TOTAL		89

Q19 My opinions about right living are informed by:

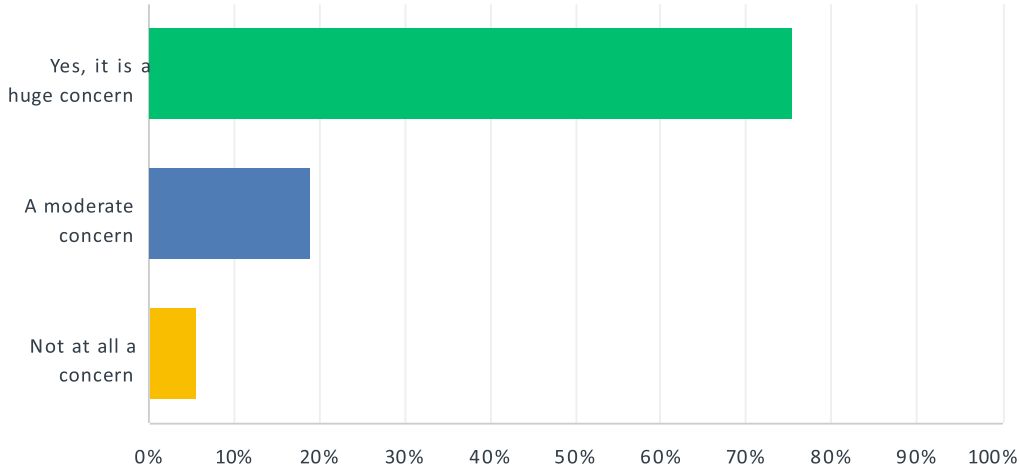
Answered: 90 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
The News I watch or read	0.00%	0
Social media	1.11%	1
Frequent engagement with Scripture	42.22%	38
regularly listening to my pastor	0.00%	0
Both reading the Bible and listening to my pastor	56.67%	51
TOTAL		90

Q20 In your opinion is biblical illiteracy an issue?

Answered: 90 Skipped: 16



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, it is a huge concern	75.56%	68
A moderate concern	18.89%	17
Not at all a concern	5.56%	5
TOTAL		90

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Disinterest. People in general are reading less.	2/16/2022 9:26 AM
2	Because many people depend on the church for all of their biblical content & not learning directly read & process the truth the scripture	2/10/2022 8:03 PM
3	Peoples busy schedule.	2/10/2022 4:09 PM
4	Several things: Pastors who don't preach from the word; the increased use of social media influence on believers; a lack of true discipleship in the church; and laziness of Christians.	2/10/2022 12:59 PM
5	As leaders, we have unintentionally caused people to depend on the church to figure out how to live. We have raised up people who follow us instead of making disciples.	2/2/2022 1:01 PM
6	Not sure	1/31/2022 7:54 PM
7	In North America the vocabulary of the Christian community may substitute for substantive understanding	1/31/2022 7:01 PM
8	Failure of pastoral leadership/ assimilation to the culture	1/31/2022 3:10 PM
9	Lack of patience to read the Bible or listen to the Gospel been preached.	1/30/2022 10:18 PM
10	Inability to rightly divide scripture and mixing of covenants.	1/29/2022 3:23 PM
11	"Topic" preaching, instead of teaching inductively	1/26/2022 4:46 PM
12	This is a multifaceted issue. First and foremost many Christians are conflicted between their faith and society. They are bombarded by the so called truth of the secular world. This makes the Bible less relevant to them. Also the busyness and distractions of our current culture.	1/26/2022 12:08 PM
13	Media / Entertainment taking up too much time	1/25/2022 8:01 PM
14	Distraction and cultural influence	1/25/2022 7:27 PM
15	The moving away from The truth of scripture and deductive Bible studies instead of inductive Bible studies	1/25/2022 7:11 PM
16	there is a low amount of people teaching context and background. we don’t understand fully what we are reading and why it is written.	1/25/2022 7:00 PM

17	Mega churches and false teachings	1/25/2022 6:28 PM
18	Decline of culture. Taking prayer from school.	1/25/2022 5:59 PM
19	Na	1/25/2022 5:58 PM
20	There’s a contentment in congregations and a lack of discipleship programs in church leadership.	1/25/2022 5:56 PM
21	Lack of interest… both for teacher and learners.	1/25/2022 5:49 PM
22	I am in full Time ministry with a organization called YWAM and we have a 3 month Bible school where we read through the whole Bible and have in depth teaching on it	1/25/2022 5:47 PM
23	1.) Getting to caught up in the Spirit (gifts ex.) 2.) Laziness 3.) Intimidation	1/25/2022 5:45 PM
24	Distraction. Along with others (myself included) not giving our time as an offering to God	1/25/2022 5:44 PM
25	Lack of awareness of the value of scripture. Scripture is not seen as living, breathing, words directly from God himself. It is often mistakenly viewed as a history book or a collection of moral stories and sayings, which have value for teaching, but aren't so important that one must know them intimately or spend precious time in them every day. Many Christians think having a general idea is good enough, so why invest more time, especially when it is viewed as a boring chore and not a joyful privilege.	1/25/2022 12:06 PM
26	We need to encourage people to read through the Bible each year and attend church at least weekly.	1/24/2022 6:10 PM
27	Adults who have low confidence in literacy skills (reading and comprehension) may feel that they are not able to understand the Bible independently.	1/23/2022 10:43 AM
28	An apathy toward spiritual disciplines of all kinds combined with the 'siren song' of electronic media	1/22/2022 6:57 PM
29	Social media	1/22/2022 10:28 AM
30	Bible Study needs to be taught as a class in some catholic schools	1/22/2022 10:05 AM
31	People do not know Bible Doctrine which is the basis of biblical application as we navigate through our daily situations and problems.	1/22/2022 9:29 AM
32	Encouraging them to read the word of God.	1/21/2022 5:11 PM
33	Busyness of life and not a priority	1/21/2022 4:59 PM

34	I would love to as I try my best with the small groups I am in.	1/21/2022 4:41 PM
35	Lack of time and the right resources	1/21/2022 10:30 AM
36	Lack of relationship with Jesus Christ	1/21/2022 9:13 AM
37	Besides spiritual blindness, people's complacency to love the truth	1/21/2022 5:31 AM
38	Idols in the heart	1/21/2022 4:57 AM
39	Disagreement on hermeneutic principles Too many other things to learn	1/20/2022 9:04 PM
40	Lack of trust in the scriptures	1/20/2022 6:12 PM
41	most of them don’t care, don’t have time to spend on reading and engaging in scriptural reading	1/20/2022 6:10 PM
42	Social media, breakdown of the family, the decline of attendance in regular church services, overall lack of personal self care...I could go on...	1/20/2022 4:54 PM
43	Too many interpretations to manipulate individuals	1/20/2022 4:43 PM
44	Every human being need to ready Bible to understand the truth.	1/20/2022 4:42 PM
45	Not taught or encouraged. Societal norms. Influence of friends and colleagues	1/20/2022 4:31 PM
46	Sharing	1/20/2022 4:12 PM
47	People are too busy they don’t do the reading that they should.	1/20/2022 4:08 PM
48	Most don’t understand its power	1/20/2022 1:23 PM
49	Encourage with so many resources online to make it easy for them	1/20/2022 1:21 PM
50	Over-reliance on news media and social media for knowledge. Also not being in a regular community of believers studying the Bible together.	1/20/2022 12:48 PM
51	Culture	1/20/2022 11:24 AM
52	1) Preaching that does not backup it's values and prescribed ways of living with Biblical Scripture. Too little time spent emphasizing the importance of daily engagement with the Word of God. 2) Preaching that does not include the Word of God. Some denominations emphasis their own doctrines and teachings over the Word of God. Their teachings should be in agreement and along side the Bible - not instead of it. 3) People think it takes a lot of time to read and it does not. One chapter a day takes no more than 5-10 minutes. Scriptures for the day are good reminders but do not give context. I believe context is often important so as not to warp the Word of God. Over time, daily reading of a chapter a day will move the Word of God from the head into the heart. 4) Lack of understanding when the Bible is read. Alternate versions help such as the Amplified, the NIV and the Message Bibles.	1/20/2022 9:14 AM

53	Pull of culture	1/20/2022 8:56 AM
54	Social media and streaming TV services seem to take people out because its instant service and people feel they are doing something, even though its nothing.	1/20/2022 8:54 AM
55	People rely on others to do the thinking for themselves rather than reading the Bible themselves to see what's actually there.	1/20/2022 8:10 AM
56	Poor teaching by popular Christian writers and preachers.	1/20/2022 12:29 AM
57	Competing priorities in life. It's also not easy to read. Requires effort and prayer to understand. Sometimes it's easier to listen to someone preach and give their take on scripture instead of reading and forming own opinions.	1/19/2022 11:40 PM
58	Not knowing how to read (illiterate); not knowing how to study the Bible in context and application	1/19/2022 9:03 PM
59	Distractions	1/19/2022 8:47 PM
60	Many churches have not prioritized Bible reading. They have prioritized church attendance and listening to preached messages. Some of prioritized a belief in "faith" or "worship" as "keys" to engaging with God.	1/19/2022 8:18 PM
61	The lack of reliable teaching about the Bible.	1/19/2022 6:53 PM
62	people are not practicing religion anymore. They do not believe in religion or church anymore. They are raising children without God,	1/19/2022 6:44 PM
63	A lack of welcoming churches	1/19/2022 6:31 PM
64	Understanding both speaker and to whom (personal cultural group) origional language (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) historical setting, (time/age. culture of group and/or culture of conqueror)	1/19/2022 6:13 PM
65	Lack of reading and lack of understanding about how to interpret it	1/19/2022 5:20 PM
66	NA	1/19/2022 4:51 PM
67	The Internet and TV, people are looking for entertainment and quick answers to life. In my secular job I had people actually tell me that such and such was solved, finished etc within an hour, and why can't I and or my company do that.	1/19/2022 3:55 PM
68	Christians compartmentalize their faith and don't feel the need to read the scriptures	1/19/2022 2:56 PM
69	A lack of discipline and a lack of wanting to serve God.	1/19/2022 2:50 PM
70	Distractions and perception of already knowing what scripture says. A lack of seeing the word as living and life changing.	1/19/2022 2:50 PM
71	Discipline of time Little time spent in study Little encouragment from fellowship / church	1/19/2022 2:11 PM

72	some Christians who think their interpretation (6 literal days of Creation OR Hyper Calvinists or other) think that all Christians must agree with their view of Scripture and when other Christians are under this teaching it discourages them from reading the Bible on their own	1/19/2022 1:56 PM
73	Poor or "not meaty" teaching, combined with people not reading the Word for themselves	1/19/2022 1:33 PM
74	It hasn't been modeled by families with their children	1/19/2022 1:31 PM
75	The world and self sufficiency of society.	1/19/2022 12:00 PM
76	People might be illiterate about the Bible but that does not hinder them to take the Bible literal which I think is the bigger issue here. You simply cannot take the Bible literal!	1/19/2022 11:44 AM
77	people not getting into the word of God and the word of God not getting into them	1/19/2022 11:23 AM
78	Podcasts and social media posts with Biblical texts	1/19/2022 11:22 AM
79	the church not focusing on the truth	1/19/2022 10:54 AM
80	Distractions, wrong priorities, lack of self-discipline, lack of accountability, low expectations	1/19/2022 7:44 AM
81	Holy Spirit	1/19/2022 5:40 AM
82	Worldly desires and not giving dedicated time to read Bible	1/18/2022 10:45 PM
83	Challenging questions that keep people from reading the Bible. Distraction.	1/18/2022 9:34 PM
84	Lack of reading the Bible for oneself	1/18/2022 8:41 PM
85	busy, lazy, do not understand	1/18/2022 8:24 PM
86	Not reading, poor teaching.	1/18/2022 6:54 PM
87	Lack of emphasis on scripture reading and meditation in churches.	1/18/2022 2:33 PM

Q22 What suggestions do you have to tackle Biblical Illiteracy among Christians?

Answered: 79 Skipped: 27

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Personal invitations and motivational incentives.	2/16/2022 9:26 AM
2	Encourage everyone to engage the Bible they an reading plan. Teach people how to read the Bible for all that it's worth.	2/10/2022 8:03 PM
3	We encourage people reading through the Bible every year.	2/10/2022 4:09 PM
4	Every church should train individuals in discipleship mentoring with new believers.	2/10/2022 12:59 PM
5	We need to encourage the reading and discussion of the word among one another. The more we interact around and about the scriptures the better people will get at interacting and talking about the scriptures.	2/2/2022 1:01 PM
6	Stay in the word	1/31/2022 7:54 PM
7	A focus on the disciplines of faith as enunciated by Foster and Willard.	1/31/2022 7:01 PM
8	Encourage delving into Scripture in small group settings	1/31/2022 3:10 PM
9	Encourage youths to attend church and participate in Bible studies.	1/30/2022 10:18 PM
10	Representing Christ in his true nature will bring the desire to study scriptures	1/29/2022 3:23 PM
11	Preach straight from scripture while including historical background and context when necessary	1/26/2022 4:46 PM
12	Locally having church wide Bible reading plans is start. Nationwide is a more difficult task. If a nationwide reading plan could be implemented that would be a strong start. Kinda like when a book club reads a certain novel simultaneously.	1/26/2022 12:08 PM
13	Christians understanding the importance of God's word	1/25/2022 7:27 PM
14	Do Bible reading programs and constant consistent Bible studies	1/25/2022 7:11 PM
15	teach, disciple others, and share stories.	1/25/2022 7:00 PM
16	Have Bible study's studying parts of the Bible taken out of context and giving context to said part of Bible	1/25/2022 6:28 PM
17	Concerted effort BY THE CHURCH as a whole to walk people through the Bible, showing it to be true and accurate, and how it can be applied to our lives today	1/25/2022 5:59 PM

18	Engaging people with the Bible	1/25/2022 5:58 PM
19	One thing I think would help is if pastors simply do sermons where the questions are asked, “what do you think?” to the congregation. And also admitting that, as humans, they can’t know it all. It takes the pressure off the pastor and on the people to understand the Word for themselves. Also, YWAM has a Bible School that goes into the local church and teaches and reads through the Bible with people who want to grow.	1/25/2022 5:56 PM
20	Train teachers	1/25/2022 5:49 PM
21	Encourage them to seek truth for themselves through the Bible and relationship with Jesus	1/25/2022 5:47 PM
22	One step at a time	1/25/2022 5:45 PM
23	Friends discipling one another and accountability	1/25/2022 5:44 PM
24	1. Teaching people to ask the Holy Spirit for revelation to receive deeply every time they open scripture. 2. Showing the power of scripture, that even Jesus himself used it to rebuke and overcome Satan. 3. Teaching methods of studying, meditating, and praying through scripture to receive the fullness of God's Word, rather than just reading, reading, reading, and wondering why it feels dry.	1/25/2022 12:06 PM
25	In depth and interesting Bible teaching.	1/24/2022 6:10 PM
26	Teaching reading, annotation, comprehension, and interpretation skills	1/23/2022 10:43 AM
27	Read it in public	1/22/2022 6:57 PM
28	Encourage to bring it back to the family	1/22/2022 10:28 AM
29	Put it in catholic/Christian schools and encouraging parents to get kids into studies	1/22/2022 10:05 AM
30	Teaching Scriptural concepts about the nature and character of God. Learning and applying His “love letters” goes along way for believers to discern and to come to Spirit Led decisions. It brings understandable concepts as we take in Gods a word. Then because He has given us free will , we choose the path of obedience or disobedience	1/22/2022 9:29 AM
31	God’s word is light to our path.in order to get rid of darkness we need God’s word in our day to day life.	1/21/2022 5:11 PM
32	More person testimony of how God used scripture in one's life.	1/21/2022 4:59 PM
33	Combination of videos, pastor going through a book of the bible at the same as a small group goes deeper	1/21/2022 4:41 PM
34	Providing material that is succinct and in the right format	1/21/2022 10:30 AM
35	Discipleship groups	1/21/2022 9:13 AM
36	Encouragement to read and pray	1/21/2022 5:31 AM
37	Face the idols (social media, self, materialism, money) break with them and turn away from them and turn fully to God and his word	1/21/2022 4:57 AM

38	Through inspiration	1/20/2022 6:12 PM
39	maybe starting from Sunday school programs	1/20/2022 6:10 PM
40	More community outreach and the ability to appeal to a variety of life's circumstances	1/20/2022 4:54 PM
41	Approach it more like Jesus. Honestly with Humility but not Pontificating	1/20/2022 4:43 PM
42	Christians need to be motivated via Bible study, small groups.	1/20/2022 4:42 PM
43	Teach them how to read. Empower them. Let them teach. Obedience Group dynamics and support	1/20/2022 4:31 PM
44	Chinese	1/20/2022 4:12 PM
45	People need the disciple to read Scripture daily and use practical applications for their lives.	1/20/2022 4:08 PM
46	Pastors must teach expository	1/20/2022 1:23 PM
47	A need for pastors to encourage from pulpits	1/20/2022 1:21 PM
48	More small groups. Keep Sunday school going as many churches have stopped it.	1/20/2022 12:48 PM
49	1) Preaching should emphasize the importance of daily engagement with the Word of God. 2) Preaching should include the Word of God. Their teachings should be in agreement and alongside the Bible. 3) Emphasize that one chapter a day takes no more than 5-10 minutes. And to read the chapter in context. Scriptures of the day are good reminders but do not give context. Over time, daily reading of a chapter a day will move the Word of God from the head into the heart. Emphasize that memorization is not necessary because one will remember over time. If a chapter is speaking to one's heart, repeat reading it over and over until the heart is satisfied. 4) Use alternate versions of the Bible such as the Amplified, the NIV and the Message Bibles.	1/20/2022 9:14 AM
50	Strong churches and strong families.	1/20/2022 8:56 AM
51	Churches need to bring back Sunday School and have a weekly engagement of study either in life groups or weekly Bible Study to get them turning the pages	1/20/2022 8:54 AM
52	Probably giving out the message that the mainstream fundamental evangelism doesn’t equate what it means to be a Christian. and everyone can make up their own mind about God’s character by reading the Bible themselves.	1/20/2022 8:10 AM
53	Identify excellent preachers, whose preaching is available on-line, and try to encourage people to listen to them. Show clips in church or mid-week meetings.	1/20/2022 12:29 AM
54	From personal experience, you need to first understand its importance compared to other things you do in life.	1/19/2022 11:40 PM
55	Not sure	1/19/2022 8:47 PM
56	We have spent too much time making "members" and "attendees" and not enough time making "disciples." We have to return to intentionally making disciples.	1/19/2022 8:18 PM
57	more bible studies	1/19/2022 6:44 PM
58	If Christians were more Christ like and less judgmental, I believe they would be in a better position to present Christ to others.	1/19/2022 6:31 PM

available. Encourage the congregation to read the Bible in a year.

59	Suggest using several different translations and if possible, borrow a translation w/ Strong's reference and concordance. But, most are "too busy" to spend time.	1/19/2022 6:13 PM
60	NA	1/19/2022 4:51 PM
61	We need to develop relationships with people and show/tell them how the Bible has helped me and my family in time of needs.	1/19/2022 3:55 PM
62	First get Christians to attend local churches. Teach Christians the importance of Christian relationships and use those relationships to study the scriptures together as a community	1/19/2022 2:56 PM
63	A rigorous Sunday School curriculum and a well-defined discipleship program.	1/19/2022 2:50 PM
64	Engaging bible study in small groups.	1/19/2022 2:50 PM
65	Set aside time on a daily basis Join a small group that is committed to study together Memorize key scripture verses Application and share with others biblical passages	1/19/2022 2:11 PM
66	invite people to read Scripture to encounter God instead of trying to proof text their particular theology	1/19/2022 1:56 PM
67	Make reading the Bible a less intimidating proposition by encouraging simply reading as a daily spiritual "nutritional" need. It took me years to begin daily Bible reading because I thought I needed study guides, and reference books and deep background study when all I really needed as a foundation was to read.	1/19/2022 1:33 PM
68	Encourage families to read God's word together regularly	1/19/2022 1:31 PM
69	To look for help in groups and discipline in reading and application	1/19/2022 12:00 PM
70	offer Bible study courses that are fun and real and is not afraid to say when we need to abstain from reading the Bible literally but metaphorically and critically	1/19/2022 11:44 AM
71	daily bible reading systematic Bible study discipleship	1/19/2022 11:23 AM
72	I do not know.	1/19/2022 11:22 AM
73	don’t hold back the truth, let the holy spirit lead	1/19/2022 10:54 AM
74	Expectations & accountability need to be raised within a discipleship/mentoring relationship with a growing Christian. People will try to live up to known expectations. (Para-church groups do this)	1/19/2022 7:44 AM
75	Dedicated individual Bible Reading time. Family Reading time and Bible study participation.	1/18/2022 10:45 PM
76	Continual pointing to the Bible. Pastors talking about reading the Bible.	1/18/2022 8:41 PM
77	bible study in cell group	1/18/2022 8:24 PM
78	A clear program within churches to fix the problem and a focus on strong, exegetical preaching in the pulpit.	1/18/2022 6:54 PM
79	Pastors need to preach the importance of daily reading the Bible. Make Bible reading plans	1/18/2022 2:33 PM

APPENDIX III

DEFINING GENERATIONS: WHERE MILLENNIALS END, AND GENERATION Z BEGINS

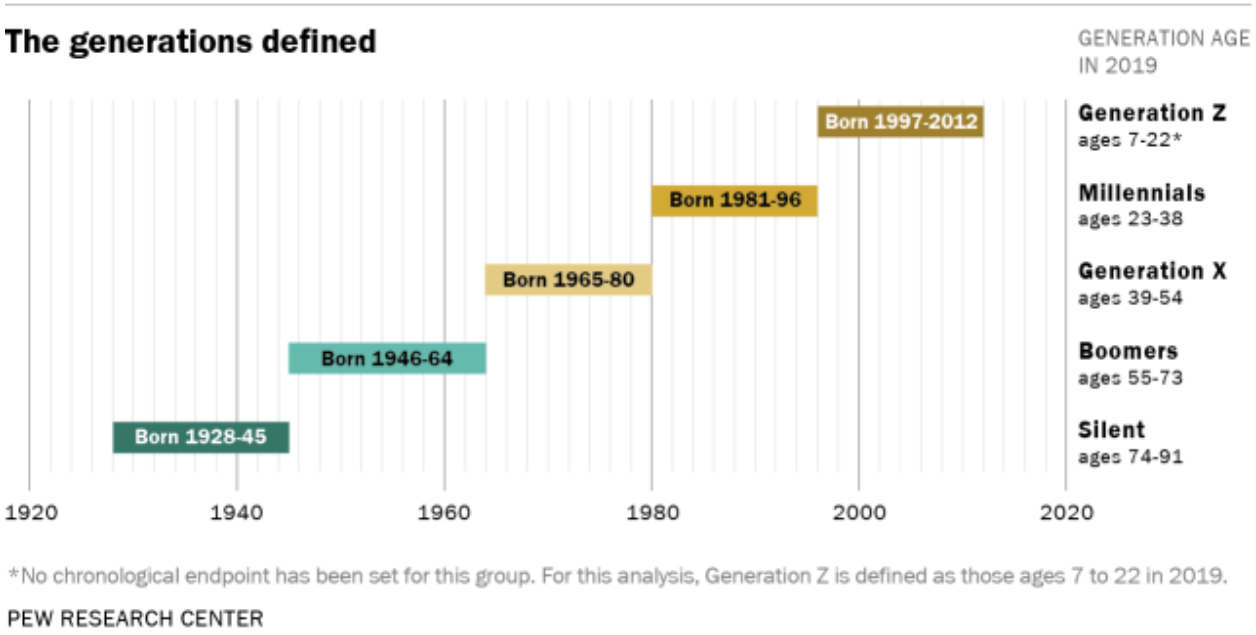
BY MICHAEL DIMOCK

Pew Research Center has studied the Millennial generation for over a decade. But by 2018, it became clear to us that it was time to determine a cutoff point between Millennials and the next generation. Turning 38 this year, the oldest Millennials are well into adulthood, and they first entered adulthood before today's youngest adults were born.

To keep the Millennial generation analytically meaningful and to begin looking at what might be unique about the next cohort, the Pew Research Center decided to use 1996 as the last birth year for Millennials for our future work. Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019) is considered a Millennial, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation, Generation Z.

https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ Accessed February 21, 2024

The following graph explains various generations.



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